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Selling the State: Nation Branding as a tool for Banal Identity Building in Estonia.

Master's Thesis

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author does not have any affiliations, nor does he hold any memberships, receive funding, or have financial holdings that might compromise the objectivity of this master's thesis.

The thesis is 21,646 words in length (excluding bibliographical references and appendices). I have written this Master's thesis independently. Ideas or data taken from other authors or sources have been fully referenced.

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Abstract

Nation branding materials represent a new forum for identity construction, yet have been largely ignored in the field of political science. Despite being a rich medium, full of symbolism and iconography, these materials continue to be regarded as ‘just marketing’, rather than an important repository for state concerns. Existing studies focus predominantly on interpreting and understanding the content that is presented, rather than understanding how they might function as an identity building tool. This paper addresses this through a focus on process, rather than end results. It asks the central question: are Nation Branding Campaigns a viable and effective tool for identity construction? Do they have a meaningful impact on their audience, both domestic and foreign? What are the limits of what can be constructed in discourse? It shows how banal nationalist tropes and ideas are negotiated and disseminated in Nation Branding campaigns and considers the unanswered question as to whether Nation branding materials are actually effective as a medium for disseminating ideas through analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. It shows the limits of what can be constructed in discourse by studying how participants contest the norms presented to them. Finally, this study examines which norms and tropes are most effective and uses this evidence to critique elements of Billig’s original thesis. There is a gap in the literature for understanding how Nation branding materials are used and whether they are effective at all at shaping opinion among the local population or in the foreign audience. Scholars such as Billig (1995), and Jansen (2004) assert that citizens are receptive to these messages but is this really the case? Does Nation Branding turn everyone into a sales representative or ad-hoc ambassador? To what extent do citizens and residents contest the material they read?

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Introduction:

Like a state visit or a diplomatic gift, Nation branding materials are rich in meaning. They serve as a repository of a state's vision for itself and rely on iconography, tropes and ideas to deliver their messages. Whilst studies have analysed how the production of stamps, coins, state visits and commemoration ceremonies reproduce banal nationalist ideas, nation branding materials have been neglected. There is a gap in the literature for understanding how Nation branding materials are used to disseminate banal nationalist content and whether they are effective. Does Nation Branding turn everyone into a sales representative or ad-hoc ambassador? How effective are nation branding materials as a new medium for national identity construction? Which tropes and ideas are participants most receptive to? Are citizens receptive to narratives imposed from the top-down or do they actively contest them?

To do this, this study uses both qualitative interview data and quantitative data gathered from a survey. The data can be split into two groups of sources: A preliminary study of the production phase analyses *how* the campaign's intellectual content was negotiated and assembled through a series of semi-structured and unstructured interviews. It establishes the structure and overall control over the production process. A second study uses semi-structured interviews and a multi-dimensional mood survey to gauge how receptive participants are to the banal nationalist content contained in the Nation branding materials. It considers which banal nationalist tropes were best received and why. Finally, this thesis reflects on practical considerations for states looking to produce branding materials as well as issues in the theoretical literature and presents the opportunities for states to use nation branding materials in their public diplomacy.

Chapter 1: Empirical Literature on Nation Branding

Overview of Nation Branding as a Practice

Nation Branding is “branding and marketing communications techniques [used] to promote a nation’s image” (Fan, 2006, p. 6). Moreover, the practice expresses a cohesive set of ideas to convey the brand’s quality (Anholt, 2003, pp.11-13). These remain common terms used by Nation Branding practitioners, but their definitions have not been pinned down in academic discourse. As with classical marketing scholarship, many authors are both practitioners and scholars. Related practices include but are not limited to Product Branding, Corporate Branding, Place / Destination Branding, Nation Branding and The Country of Origin Effect.

The literature highlights the importance of acquiring prestige and dispelling negative capital. It brings up themes connected to survival and competition as the main reasons that states engage in Nation Branding to bolster prestige (Anholt, 2004, 2008). Kotler *et al* (1999; 2002) suggest four economically-driven reasons: (1) A need to stay ‘relevant’ in the global marketplace; (2) Shedding the negative capital associated with that country’s past, i.e. Germany’s 2013 “Land of Ideas” campaign; (3) global competition for tourism and foreign direct investment; and (4) Prestige.¹ These assumptions are shared by Dinnie (2008) who distills the motivations similarly: (1) export-growth, (2) FDI & tourism, (3) influence-building and (4) managing negative stereotypes. Morgan & Pritchard (2004) stress how reputation gained through branding functions as protection against system vulnerabilities, especially for smaller states, a notion echoed in Anholt’s “Competitive Identities” concept.

Nation Branding & Public Diplomacy

Anholt asserts that Nation Branding will overtake public diplomacy as “the dominant channel of communication for national identity” (Anholt, 2003, p. 139). Situated within a range of related practices within the marketing discipline, Nation Branding is a key part of the tool box for public diplomacy. This and other contradictions make the practice contentious and have provoked debate between practitioners and scholars. In creating Brand

¹ Jordan (2014) discusses competition for international events among small states. In particular, see Anholt (2008) for a discussion of the Singapore Formula One Grand Prix in 2008 and Russia’s continued desire to host the World Cup.

Identity Dinnie (2008) argues that practitioners must create ‘Brand Differentiation’, a practice opposed to the consensus seeking of Public Diplomacy.

Place Branding & Nation Branding

Whilst a full discussion of Place Branding as a separate practice to Nation Branding lies beyond the scope of this thesis as the topic has been covered extensively by practitioners such as Peter Kentie, Simon Anholt and Kotler et al., it shares several key concepts (see Product vs Nation Branding). Skinner describes it as “promotional activities, contextualised in the domain of marketing communications, marking the place with a distinct identity in the minds of the *various target groups* [emphasis added] targeted by the incorporated place, from an *inside-out* [emphasis added] approach, assuring the place’s multiple stakeholders, in partnership, manage and communicate the place’s brand identity to a wider world as they wished it to be presented.” (Skinner, 2008, p.923.) He does not see Place and Nation Branding as distinct concepts, even if Nation Branding draws, to a greater extent, on intangible brand value that can be created for countries, nations, regions, towns and villages. For both scholars, they see the defining characteristic as Branding as a practice, regardless of scale (Anholt, 2007, p52).²

Anholt (2008) offers six paradigms for building place image. Earlier scholarship does not distinguish between place (city/town) and Nation branding. By (1) influencing “pre-trip information” for tourists; (2) promoting exports based on the Country of Origin (COO) framework; (3) foreign policy; (4) domestic policy; (5) FDI and foreign investments (overseas); (6) cultural/sporting events, Nation Branding practitioners can write a place’s image into being. Early scholarship makes little consideration of the historical and cultural content upon which Nation Branders draw. In their study of this first category, Echtner & Ritchie (2003) develop “The Meaning and Measurement of Destination Image” (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003) in their extensive study of tourists and their perceptions of tourist destinations. It supposes a visitor has a mental image of a destination before they visit. Crucially, they argue, this image is developed through exposure to media campaigns, literature, TV, etc., even if they have *not* visited. For this reason, they argue that a country’s brand is open to continual renegotiation, like any other product.

² see Kotler & Gertner (2002) for a full discussion of the extent to which National Identity informs Nation Branding Campaigns.

Nation vs Corporate Branding

Anholt views Nation Branding as similar to corporate branding in “all but a few respects” since it is malleable and constructed like any other product brand (Anholt, 2002; 2008). Anholt has strong standing in the literature of Nation Branding, being both a practitioner, scholar and critic of the discipline. His most famous contribution to the literature and practice is his “Branding Hexagon” that encompasses such aspects as: (1) Tourism, (2) Brands; (3) Policy; (4) Investment; (5) Culture; (6) People.³ The practices are, to a large extent, examples of the same practices, developed at different scales, a position maintained by several dominant scholars and practitioners (Anholt, 2008; Fan, 2002).

Classical marketing discourse tells us that a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination [thereof] intended to identify the goods or services of a seller and differentiate them from competitors” (Kotler et al, 2006, p. 3). Nation Branding is connected to aspirational or values-based projections of a country, rather than to a single product.⁴ The brand must be constructed with more complex ‘stories’ rather than the usual marketing mix: corporate brands project intangible ideas about a given company that consumers can “buy into” whereas product branding is more functional: it describes and sells specific or tangible products, which a consumer may need or desire (Balmer, 2002, p13).

	Corporate Branding	Nation Branding
Focus	The Company, or a product	A country, or an aspect thereof.
Coordinator(s)	Marketing Team, reports to CEO/CMO	Often outsourced**
Informed by:	Key Stakeholders	Key Stakeholders
Delivered by:	Marketing team, employees to some extent	Marketing team, citizens to some extent
Goals	Strategic, profit, brand status	Strategic profit, status, recognition, security.

Fig 1.: Table adapted from (Balmer, 2002, p13). Summary of crucial differences between corporate and Nation Branding.

Anholt (1998) makes a crucial difference between (1) public domain and (2) private domain brands. Whilst both seek to promote differentiation, they differ in the scope of their audiences (see Jansen, 2004). Nation Branding differs from other forms of Branding in that it is designed for an external audience rather than for domestic consumption.

³ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20080511193956/http://www.nationbrandindex.com/> [accessed 14 March 2017].

⁴ see Hatch & Schultz, 2001 for a full discussion

Whilst this is a helpful distinction, scholars have pointed to the trend of the Nation Branding increasingly targeting the domestic audience.⁵ Put crudely, constructed stories and identities give a country's people "something to believe in" in much the same way that corporate branding might promote the particular moral dimension of buying into their products; they serve as a repository for ideas about where that country might be going, a concept that maps with a country's role conception, something highly relevant to smaller states who must carve out niches for themselves in the international system. States can justify tough choices and proceed with pragmatic policies or reforms with a view to bettering that country's wealth, even seeking to shape the conduct of their own people (see Dzenovcka, 2004). Her particular critique points to the fact that the audience of Nation Branding campaigns has been in flux since the early 90s when the practice gained traction, moving towards domestic as well as international consumption. She notes the advent of technology and English as a lingua-franca in expanding domestic consumption.⁶

Her view is shared by Hatch & Schulz (2003): increasingly Nation Branding campaigns are received and judged by residents who are consulted during and after completion. This, they argue, has particular application for overcoming a place or country's negative historical or political associations, as is discussed by Baker & Cameron (2007) who touch briefly on Germany's Land of Ideas strategy (2013). In the same spirit, Florek (2005) considers Poland's campaign to shed negative capital associated with its export's poor reputation and Nuttavuthisit (2006) looks at the Thai government's strategy to distance itself from sex work and sex tourism.

⁵ Brand Estonia campaigns have attracted considerable media attention domestically. The publication of the most recent 2017 campaign was well documented. Public awareness about branding efforts has grown.

⁶ This echoes the practice in corporate marketing where marketing's target group has broadened considerably to include not just consumers but investors, actors in a country or company's wider supply chain and employees as well as residents, too. Brands must be perceived positively by a wider group of people, energy is focused on the company or country rather than individual products or services (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

The processes of Nation building and Nation Branding are often forced to run concurrently, especially where states lack resources. A Nation Branding campaign must set out a clear teleological vision for a country, whilst National Identity must look for a founding myth. A branded nation is, Aronczyk argues, markedly different from the symbolism of the Nation that came before it (2014, p.4). It is a rationalized competitive entity competing in the global political and economic action space. Since practitioners are interested in tying their *product* to a coherent set of values propositions desirable to their audience, a Nation Branding campaign will always paper over the cracks of societal divisions. Stahlberg & Bolin (2015) explore this in their study of the Ukrainian national branding efforts, a country with *arguably* equally fractious divisions about history, language and identity as Estonia.

Skinner describes it as “promotional activities, contextualised in the domain of marketing communications, marking the place with a distinct identity in the minds of the *various target groups* [emphasis added] targeted by the incorporated place, from an *inside-out* [emphasis added] approach, assuring the place’s multiple stakeholders, in partnership, manage and communicate the place’s brand identity to a wider world as they wished it to be presented.” (Skinner, 2008, 923.)

The tension between Nation Branding and ‘national identity’ reveals itself in the question: who is the target of Nation Branding? (Dinnie (2008). Dinnie sees three crucial stages to Nation Branding: (1) history – the Country’s dominant culture, norms, - forms the ‘heart and soul’ of the nation, i.e. the ‘Brand Identity’. (2) This must be transmitted by its ‘brand ambassadors’, i.e. its people. The product that is received by the country’s people is the nation’s ‘Brand Image’. This opens up a crucial question about audience, since Nation Branding seeks to influence the perceptions of those outside the state, rather than to create a coherent ‘us’ identity within it: “companies sell a small fraction of goods to their staff, but countries mostly sell goods and services to themselves” (Krugman, 1996 p. 41). Practitioners must navigate this semantic space, using the content of national identity to create a Brand which appears to the outside world (Ståhlberg, 2010, p.4). Gienow-Hecht (2012) explores these contradictions in relation to Spain’s successful “Marca Espana” branding campaign that sought to shed the negative capital associated with the Franco period. She comments on the

homogenous presentation of Spain, a country with five official languages and high levels of regional autonomy.

Whilst nation building can be ethnic or civic, liberal or illiberal, Nation Branding has been seen as comparatively banal (Billig, 1995 in Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2015, p. 2). Billig stresses the idolatry quality of Nation Branding with his analogy of the national flag, once a means of communication but now a vessel for identity. The ritualization of nationhood maps neatly to Nation Branding which takes on a similarly demonstrative and performative function for the attention of others, rather than for domestic consumption (Billig, 1995, p.39). Billig's theory will form the theoretical map for understanding Nation branding materials as a vessel for identity and a means for identity construction, accordingly.

Power & Accountability

The Concept of 'Brand Steerers' (Dinnie, 2008) leads to the second major critique raised by the literature that the processes by which Nation Branding campaigns are assembled. Gilmore (2002) contends that such a homogenized end-product is not inevitable, providing that sufficient stakeholders are consulted, Nation Branding Campaigns are likely to reproduce dominant narratives, stereotypes. Stakeholders are likely to be influential rather than marginalised.

Vergo & Chernatony (2006) examine the role of stakeholders in creating cohesive brand identities; they coin the term 'brand-steerers'. This term includes what scholars such as Anholt or Kotler et al term 'stakeholders' as well as marketing professionals and practitioners. They see both groups as having equal standing, whereas scholars such as Jansen would critique the involvement of international companies. Notably, Peter Kentie was very much involved with the "Estonishing" brand that he proposed for Estonia. This is significant as he is not a citizen of Estonia, rather a practitioner famous for branding Eindhoven, Netherlands. This Highlights Jansen's critique (2004) that Nation Branding campaigns are the preserve of marketing elites, rather than representations of the citizens they represent. His interest in the campaign was born out of an interest as a practitioner in promoting his field of work, rather than in a faithful and sensitive representation of Estonia as it is.

The semiotic processes of Nation Branding are hyper-visible in their promotion of a narrative. Since one message must always be privileged above others, scholars have criticised Nation Branding for its reductive practice that favours elite-level concerns (Jansen, 2004, p. 27). While scholars such as Gilmore (2002) contend that this outcome is not inevitable, provided there is sufficient and wide stakeholder engagement, scholars rightly critique the way already dominant narratives, stereotypes are reproduced. Many scholars have used the motif of “speaking with one voice” and asked whose voice exactly (Anholt, 2008, p. 94; Kotler et al, 2008; Jansen, 2004). In their study of Ukraine, elite-level participants repeatedly commented on the need for Ukraine to speak “with one voice” about issues of identity and culture (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2015), a finding echoed by Gvalia et al (2014) in their study of elite-level role conceptions in Georgian politics as well as in the findings of this thesis.

In other words, the “one voice” is the dominant aspirational vision for that country that wins out through interactions with stakeholders. The contentious role of stakeholders reflects a key debate within Nation Branding practice and scholarship: who is allowed to shape and form the ideological or historical content of a Nation Branding campaign and does it represent the people it claims to? Since private companies are often outsourced to make the materials. This tension has been covered extensively by Jansen (2004) and other scholars. They ask how private companies can meaningfully represent the people of ‘the Nation’. Are stake holders representative of citizens or do they represent vested interests and lobbies.

Corporate and Nation Branding campaigns are more likely to be influenced by elite-level ideas, since they require greater degrees of strategic thinking than product branding. Such a campaign communicates where that country (or company) is going, whereas product-led branding can be executed by a small team.

While the structures within which branding materials are coordinated are often non-transparent, Branders cannot force people to believe in them (Anholt, 2003, pp130,131). Critiques of Nation Branding projects have centred on their top-down approach, conceived by those in positions of power (Jansen, 2004). Pawlusz & Seliverstova (2016, pp69-86) offer a counterweight to this dominant approach in her study of informal practices used to reproduce or alter identity construction with contrasting studies from Ukraine and Estonia. After all, people are not passive recipients of messages delivered by top-down Nation Branding

campaigns, not least the overwhelmingly educated, cosmopolitan part of society more likely to consume them. Whilst elites may set frames, the actual experience of these campaigns is “an independent, ongoing process where even the well-known and taken-for-granted icons of nationhood have no fixed and pre-defined meaning”: This thesis zooms in on the frame setting process and how this was steered by elite-level actors:

“If the press is free, consistency of message cannot be enforced; and in the era of the internet and satellite technologies, even totalitarian regimes cannot fully control information flows.” (Jansen, 2004, p.81).

Even if elite-level groups may be able to impart their dominant narrative or role-conception for the nation on others, there is no guarantee that it will be accepted (Anholt, 2005 and Kotler et al, 2006). The failure of Cool Britannia as a concept also highlights the inherent feature of Nation Branding campaigns to highlight only certain narratives; the essence of modern Britain was meant to be pluralistic, yet this campaign made no sense. In Dinnie’s terms, it failed to gain “brand equity”. Many studies (see Dinnie, 2008; Anholt, 2009) have pointed out where this fails, i.e. Tony Blair and the Labour Government’s ‘Cool Britannia’ strategy, a pun on *Rule Britannia*, that failed to gain traction among the public.

Economic Interests in Nation Branding

Unlike the theoretical literature, Nation Branding scholars and practitioners write almost exclusively in the post-Cold War context. It is a practice that has been shaped and informed by the post-Cold War economic consensus for market norms. Market norms inherent in Nation Branding are rendered in manifold different ways: Ollins (1999) terms Nation Brands as ‘trading identities’ or “commercial nationalism” and Anholt as ‘competitive identities’ (Ibid., 2007, p72). Such views typify the consensus that Nation Branding is part of resource maximisation to gain a more favourable place in a competitive ‘marketplace’ for identity, or to shed negative capital associated with the past (Anholt, 2008).

Nation Branding is a relatively new practice developed predominantly by its practitioners. Thus far it has received limited attention from academics, in part due to its

recent emergence as a practice. The literature is dominated by Nation Branding as a marketing strategy to promote exports and tourism (Anholt, 2008; Fan, 2002) whereas academic literature favours study of the tensions between nationhood and Nation Branding as a practice (see Gienow-Hecht, 2012; Jansen, 2004). There is a clear split between the two categories, with practitioners being overwhelmingly in favour and the academic literature being largely critical. This may suggest a conflict of interest, since its practitioners have a financial interest in the success of the practice. Scholars criticise those who approach Nation Branding from a free-market, resource maximisation perspective, arguing that Nation Branding campaigns are not faithful to those they represent. In particular, scholars such as Jansen (2004) are highly critical of what they perceive as an inherently neo-liberal practice led by the private sector, rather than being representative of citizens.

The critique of the dominance of elite-level ideas feeds into a wider critique that Nation Branding is an inherently neoliberal practice. Aronczyk (2013) critiques the dominance of PR and Brand consultancies based outside of those countries “being branded”. With a focus on post-Communist nations in Eastern Europe. Whilst she seeks this practice as understandable, given the turn away from the state as the primary arbiter of human affairs. Ståhlberg (2010) shares Jansen’s neo-liberal critique. His study of Ukraine’s Nation Branding draws upon campaigns between 2004 and 2013, featuring elite-level interviews with PR professionals in Kiev. The crux of their findings is that “nation branding is a practice of meaning management related to discourses of both economic globalization and cultural cosmopolitanism”; that is to say that “collective identities are sometimes of limited relevance” (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2015).

Scholars like Jansen worry that Nation Branding campaigns privilege “only those features of the nation that has market value” (Jansen 2008), pointing the transfer of power and resources away from citizens, in favour of ‘creatives’ or ‘marketing professionals’, terms she uses pejoratively. The critique that Nation Branding campaigns favour some voices over others is naturally valid, if obvious. She advocates retaliatory ‘semiotic guerrilla warfare’, in the vein of Umberto Eco “to resist branding of the world” (Jansen, 2004, p. 23). This critique is informed by her wider scholarship that adopts some Marxist premises and assumptions. The stated goal of her central paper is to highlight Nation Branding’s role in ‘naturalising’ such norms but provides no moral basis for doing so.

Aronczyk (2013) and Jansen (2004) critique the consumer-based brand equity models proposed by scholars such as Keller (1993) and Anderson (1990). These make no distinction between product and Nation Branding, arguing that both can be branded to the consumer using associative network memories models that inform the psychological flank of marketing scholarship (see Anderson, 1990). Whilst a full discussion of this aspect of marketing scholarship lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, this has been taken up by Wells (2014) in which she explores behavioural psychology and consumer behaviour in non-traditional marketing fields.

Dominance of Country of Origin perspectives

Country of Origin (henceforth: COO) is the most developed paradigm in the wider literature. This perspective has dominated the discipline largely a result of the discipline evolving from classical marketing theory, a position established by Skinner & Kubecki (2007) and Fan (2008). It foregrounds the importance of increasing FDI or tourism, neglecting how less tangible aspects such as culture or foreign policy concerns are articulated and negotiated (see Anholt, 2008). This has been so crucial in shaping scholarship, tipping the balance in favour of understanding Nation Branding as a natural form of resource maximisation but ignoring the less tangible aspects of statehood, despite these being a component part of the literature (see Anholt, 2008, Kotler et al and Jansen, 2004). This thesis seeks to balance against this dominant perspective, foregrounding the way that the intangible aspects of statehood are negotiated.

As the most obvious marker of Nation's reputation, "Made in..." or COO branding has informed trade policy and public diplomacy as early as the 19th Century. Verlegh & Steenkamp (1999) demonstrate how products are brought to market, relying on their origin branding. They also offer a valuable discussion of this process during China's entry into the WTO.

Han (1989) compared perceptions between COO in poorer and more developed countries, also demonstrating how brands tied to their COO are perceived domestically and internationally. This work highlights how Nation Branding campaigns can have a domestic or international focus. More et al, (1996) explored the role of COO in influencing consumer choice predominantly in Asia in a comparative study that explored perceptions of quality,

reliability and the ethics of “buying in to” brands from ‘foreign’ markets. Hamin (2006) recreates much of this approach in his study recent study of ethnocentrism and its role in consumer choice in which he finds that consumer decisions were consistently affected by a preference for the domestic over international products. This is developed further still by Pharr (2005) who studies how these phenomena have been transformed and adapted in e-commerce.

Nation Branding in Europe

In Europe, Nation Branding as a practice meshes with nation building goals: in particular, two narratives about the (1a) restoration and (1b) preservation of a homeland, featuring motifs connected to language, culture and heritage and (2) “Europeanness” and all its connotations of reform, good governance and democratic legitimacy (Feldman, 2001). This is expanded by Jansen (2008) and Jordan (2014) highlight how nation-branding initiatives, sporting events and other ritual practices that reproduce these discourses inevitably become bound up in identity politics.

A considerable body of literature covers Nation Branding in the Balkans and the CEE region. The two regions are similar in that a larger territory gave rise to several new states based broadly on ethnic lines, and that this has persisted for some time. Several campaigns for post-Soviet transition states feature orientalist notions (see Kaneva, 2007). This was the case in Romania (2007) in a strategy dominated by folklore, national dress and international ‘brands’ such as Dracula (Light, 2001; *ibid.*, 2007). Scholars have explored event branding, i.e. Eurovision as strategies of reshaping national perceptions, with particular respect to modern cultural practices (Pawlusz, 2017; see also Jansen, 2008; Jordan, 2014).

Nation Branding offers a direct clash with Marxism. As the name suggests, the practice centres the nation rather than class as well as promoting exceptionalism and stressing individual or varying collective ethnic identities. This is an issue common to transition states in the CEE and Baltic regions, where Russian and Soviet *korenizatsiya* policies sought to remove political power from national movements. Nation Branding can be regarded as the opposite of communism: it presents the opportunity for states to negotiate their own image and position in the world in a way like never before (Pawlusz, 2017; Kolstø 2014). It can be

used to signify they are safe and prepared for European Integration (Kaneva 2012). Not only is Nation Branding as a practice diametrically opposed to Communist nationality policy, since it promotes differentiation of both individuals in communities and nations in the international arena but it is also the means by which market norms and the ideals of broadly-market based societies.

Nation Branding in Estonia

The main stages in Estonia's Nation Branding Campaign "identify strategic national narratives" (Aronczyk, 2017). Whilst I make brief mention of the materials produced for the Estonian presidency of the European Union but do not see these as part of the same continuum of Nation branding materials. Estonia's online branding efforts occupy the prime domains Estonia.ee and brand.estonia.ee, presenting Estonia centre stage to the rest of the world as a repository for Estonia's Interests. Where the two previous campaigns articulated Estonia's past and narrated a present, the most recent campaign serves as a roadmap for future development. These campaigns are punctuated by and bear reference to developments in Estonian society, as indicated on the graph below.

Previous campaigns largely map to key events in Estonia's 'story' following the fall of the Soviet Union. Early campaign stressed Finno-Ugric roots and Nordic traditions to articulate a past: "[Estonia] boasts the 3000-year-old crater of an iron meteorite that influenced the religions and customs of the Baltic Sea region" and "DNA proves that we are closely related to the Latvians [...] but our language has relatives among Finno-Ugric people in faraway Siberia. (Estonian Institute, Celebration in Pawlusz, 2017, p8). These efforts culminate in Estonia's 2017 EU presidency serves a *seal of approval* for Estonia's successful re-entry to Europe and its institutions. But the most recent campaign offers a vision of Estonia that is more prosperous, convenient and prestigious, but a vision of life more compelling: it is a plan for how to build a better country, a story that citizens can tell themselves to help them achieve this. Is this an attempt to clear up the national psyche, dispel the negative capital of the communist era?

Pawlusz (2017) highlights the seemingly mundane elements used to "reproduce and confirm identity through the reconstruction of the everyday life of the citizens of a country".

These include the images of boulders, lattes and Wifi connectivity depicted in the Branding Materials. Her research focussed on speaking with those who executed the Nation Branding in a practical way, i.e. employees at Tallinn port or airport who had been ‘briefed’ to deliver the key messages. A growing body of literature that addresses non-traditional spaces for identity construction outside of state-led initiatives. She gives the particular examples of singing, folk dancing and popular art and highlights their secondary role as spaces in which identity is developed. (Pawlusz, 2017):

“To its critics it is identity politics (Aronczyk, 2007) or commercial nationalism (see Volcic 2008). There is, however, consensus that “branding campaigns (re)produce culturally embedded features of national identity and define the nation for locals” (Pawlusz, 2017).⁷

Because Pawlusz offers an extensive ethnography of airports and ports where these materials are used and reproduced I do not offer anything more than the observations from my field notes based on observations of and casual interactions with airport staff air-side at Tallinn airport who wore ‘welcome to Estonia’ badges (2016).

⁷ See also Dzenovska, 2005; Kaneva, 2007; and Widler 2007.

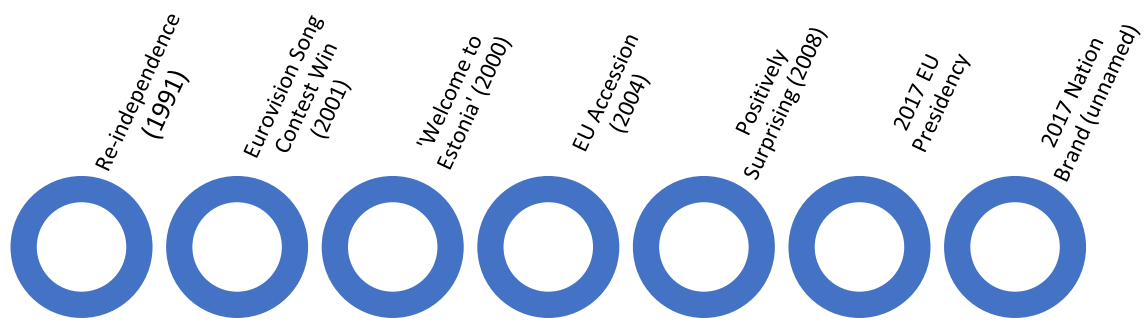


Fig. 1: Summary: Key Events and Key Campaigns and how these relate to the three main phases of Nation Branding in Estonia to date.

Campaign 1: Welcome to Estonia

Welcome to Estonia was commissioned for the Millennium to capitalise on media attention following its 2001 Eurovision success. The slogan “Welcome to Estonia” sought to convey Estonia’s peaceful transition and general good governance that would support its ambitions to ‘re-join’ Europe in 2004 as well as promoting investment, tourism and trade links. The task was executed by Enterprise Estonia [EAS], a spin-off from the Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs. Under EAS, the “Brand Estonia” concept was devised in cooperation with Interbrand and Emor, two marketing agencies. The campaign as adopted by Tallinn Port and Airport, several private business and other stakeholder groups and leveraged a variety of print and digital media.



Fig 2.: *Welcome to Estonia Logo*, source: *Estonia.ee*

Campaign II: Positively Surprising

Positively Surprising (2008) was not a dramatic rebrand on the original but aimed to close the chapter on transition. In essence, Estonia had successfully transitioned into a mature middle-income Western country that had successfully left the ‘Post-Soviet Space’. The campaign included the slogan “Estonia: the best kept secret of Scandinavia” and imagines Estonia’s distinctly European geography: it is Baltic, but more generally Northern and European, consistent with the political *tone at the top* to distance Estonia from its other two Baltic neighbours in light of its successful transition (Mole, 2012).



Fig. 3: Estonia Positively surprising, combined with Welcome to Estonia, Source: Brand.Estonia.ee

Campaign III: *untitled*

This Nation Branding Campaign contains two study objects: (1) the home page and related materials at www.estonia.ee/ and (2) the brand Estonia toolbox located at www.brand.estonia.ee/. Brand Estonia always had a brand concept but this is the first time that it has been published open-source online. Thus, users are invited to be spokespersons and ambassadors within the confines of the pre-defined meta-narrative of the Brand Estonia toolbox (cf Sayegh, 2008, p10). Whilst materials may differ slightly, through style and visuals, a thread is sewn through the materials - the creation of a signature look that connects all narratives together creates a meta-narrative more powerful than any individual narrative.

The current campaign differs from the two previous campaigns by being dynamic: the two pages have the capacity to grow organically with updates and minor changes over time. In this sense, the latest concept is not a snapshot in time but a means of narration in conveying the values of Estonia's story, echoing current practice in commercial marketing. It is more akin to a social media feed in that the latest content can be added to the existing and the user can scroll through, reflecting Penrose's observation that "the meanings attached to the nation are neither invariant nor stable over time" and that these are best represented through "incremental changes in the nation's understanding in the broader population" (Penrose, 2011, pp13,14). As a spokesperson from EAS puts it:

"Estonia.ee is a virtual gate to Estonia, that page is ready and we will update only facts and add new success stories to the site as everyday work and same goes to

brand.estonia.ee online brand guidelines page, the guides are ready we will update inspiration part with new materials and also if we receive feedback that some guidelines need to be more specific or more explained in detail then we will make additions.” – Liisi Toots

The descriptions on both websites are succinct and therefore dense in meaning; a detailed content or discourse analysis of its contents could yield valuable data in a related study, but this lies beyond the scope of this study. I list some key features below.



Fig 4.: Estonia: A place for independent minds, source Estonia.ee

brand estonia

Brand Estonia helps you introduce Estonia in a way that attracts attention, creates trust and makes you proud.

It can be used by anyone who wants to talk about Estonia: businesses, government institutions, universities, organisations, events and people.

Here you will find the tools to introduce Estonia in a considered, clear and recognizable way. Together we will create the image of Estonia.

Designed something new with Estonian brand? Share with us brand@estonia.ee.

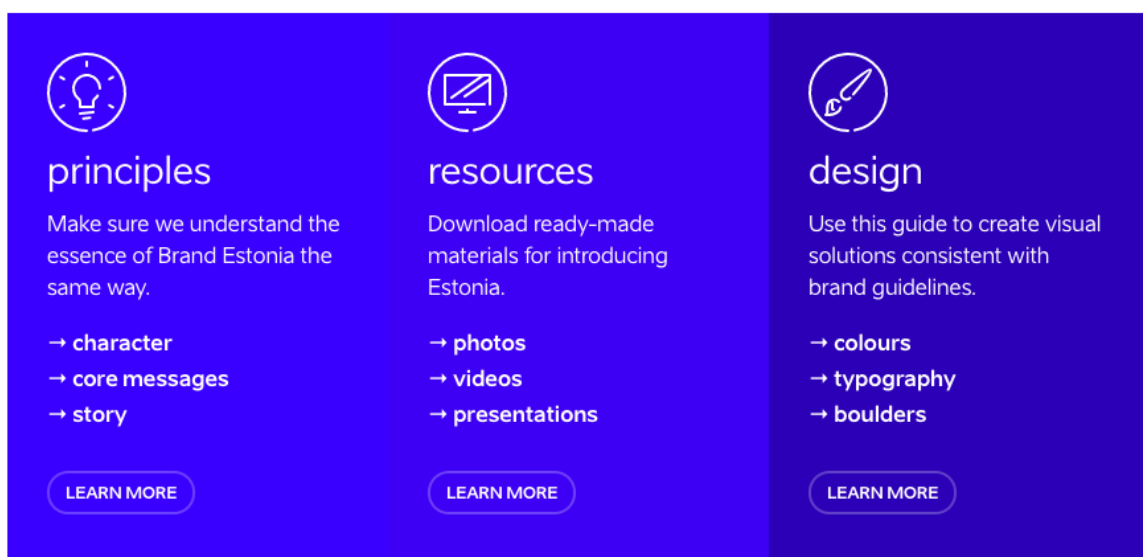


Fig 5.: Extract, Brand Estonia Homepage, source: Brand.Estonia.ee

Is there a way to create a brand without a logo? Estonians think there is

For the next 15-20 years, Estonians will have at their disposal the new brand of Estonia, which replaces the former, Welcome to Estonia, sign-based brand.

[CONTINUE TO ARTICLE](#)

Fig. 6: Title Page, article from brand.estonia.ee

Frequent use of deixical referents such as ‘we’, ‘you’, ‘Estonia’, or ‘helps you’; ‘makes you proud’ ask who is the *you* intended here – it is clearly an Estonian citizen or resident, rather than a visitor, foreign student or investor. Already, including the domestic audience indicates a step change in audience: typically branding materials are solely for international consumption. “It can be used by [institutions]” – but which? Which government – or perhaps it should not matter. If Nation Branding Campaigns are usually top-down impositions of corporate interests (Jansen, 2004), then what might we learn from something that was created by its stakeholders? And what we also learn by understanding the exact input that these stakeholders have in shaping the final product. Would this be a more effective and authentic campaign?

Many features in the most recent campaign suggest timelessness and *borderlessness*. There is even no Estonian flag other than shades of blue, white and black in the colour scheme. It is a far cry from folk dresses and medieval food. However, there are repeated banal flagging of Estonia through repeated wide-shot photographs that stress large, open expanses and depict typically Estonian landscapes with familiar images of lakes, trees and forests, thus nationalising the landscape, the weather and every possible Estonian trope. Moreover, the presence of IT and technology norms evokes the “mythology of the Internet as

a post-national realm”, whilst stressing Estonia’s key successes in IT and digital industries (Aronczyk, 2017, p12).

Other phrases such as “Estonia is a place for independent minds” engenders the same absurdity of Canada’s nationless nationalism as studied by Gulliver (2011). Whilst every mind may be somewhat independent, the semantics of ‘independent’ here may preclude those who do not share a distinct teleological goal for Estonia’s direction as a nation.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Literature: Banal Nationalism

Here I outline the scholarship around Banal Nationalism, which will form the theoretical map for structuring and interpreting the data gathered for this thesis. Banal Nationalism is the correct theoretical framework because for many people Nation branding materials *are* banal and so are not perceived as instruments of identity construction: some participants interviewed for this study remarked that the materials were ‘just marketing’ but since studies of marketing materials have revealed them to be so dense in meaning, the symbolic patterns present in Nation branding materials make them a worthy study object too.

The data collected in this thesis could be analysed from many angles, such as Anderson’s Imagined Communities theory. However, Anderson’s theory does not sufficiently explore the “continual acts of imagination” necessary to sustain identity that were found when analysing data (Billig, 1995, p71).:

“Once nations are established, and nationalism becomes banal, the poets are typically replaced by prosaic politicians and the epic ballads by government reports. The imagined community ceases to be reproduced by acts of the imagination. In established nations, the imagination becomes inhabited, and, thereby, inhibited. In this sense, the term “imagined community” may be misleading. The community and its place are not so much imagined, but their absence becomes unimaginable (Billig, 1995, p.70).”

The tropes presented are concerned with conveying the day-to-day of being Estonian: the digital society, a certain lifestyle and ordinary day-to-day culture, even if this is somewhat romanticised (Skey, 2009). It shows a life with “a banal mysticism, which is so banal that all the mysticism seems to have evaporated long ago, binds ‘us’ to the homeland - that special place which is more than a place, more than a geophysical area.” (Billig, 1995, p8). Using Billig’s theory in connection with Nation branding materials gives a direct insight into the way that nations may be ‘purposively constructed’ in a ‘daily plebiscite’ (Billig, 1995, p7)

This thesis is concerned with assessing Nation branding materials as a medium for disseminating pre-existing, elite-level ideas, rather than as a medium for constructing new norms and values. Moreover, this reflects Estonia’s status as a newly “settled” nation. Previous nation branding campaigns have already conveyed the *return to Europe* and successful transition and integration in the West. The materials in this study are very much

indicative of Estonia in a post-transition state: no longer positively surprising or transforming but *transformed*: the literature of banal nationalism is more suited to “‘settled nations’ and ‘settled times’” than periods upheaval” (Bonikowski, 2016, p429).

In choosing this theory, this study moves away from the literature of transition states and evaluates Estonia’s attempts to write itself into being from a post-transition standpoint. Whilst another approach may have been appropriate for previous Nation Branding Campaigns, the present is all about establishing Estonia as a settled nation, not a positively transforming, surprising or transitioning nation but one which is ready to engage its partners as a member of key institutions.

Banal Nationalism

The key text I refer to is Billig’s 1995 work, “Banal Nationalism”, which deals in understanding the “ideological means by which nation-states are reproduced” in everyday life to “reinforce their legitimacy by constantly ‘flagging’ the national identity to their citizens”. Since, Nation branding materials are a space where “beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices” are negotiated and reproduced, they are a suitable place to look for banal nationalism (Billig, 1995, p. 7).

Billig’s approach sees the day-to-day phenomenon essential for constructing “ideological habits” observable in everyday life in “settled nations” (Billig, 1995, p6). He is interested in the way citizens participate in the voluntary reproduction of these habits and rituals. This continual ‘flagging’ allows a sense of nationhood to be maintained as “a mode of political discourse articulated in the public sphere” (Brubaker, 2004, p138). In Billig’s own words:

“To stretch the term ‘nationalism’ indiscriminately would invite confusion [...]. For this reason, the term banal nationalism is introduced to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced. [...] Daily, the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged’, in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nation-states, is the endemic condition.” (Billig 1995, p63).

The placement of flags at sporting events or in other everyday contexts, common expressions and references to institutions, or references to national tropes such as national weather or landscapes are all typical examples of banal nationalist ‘flaggings’ (Billig, 1995, p.12). Some scholars even point to the headings ‘national’ and ‘international’ news as being examples of how identity is often created “in contexts where it is least expected” (Skey, 2009, pp.25-26). These are all key examples of how Billig saw modern identities are “created and maintained”, even in seeming international contexts. However, banal nationalism is distinct from extreme variations of Nationalism. However, Billig (1995) sees banal nationalism as essentially as the narrow end of the wedge of all forms of Nationalism. This claim is unfounded and will be tested.

Billig was predominantly interested in American Banal Nationalism, which he perceived as all-pervasive, accompanying a more interventionist American foreign policy. The theory was formed during the final stages of the Yugoslav wars and was part of a surge in interest in Nationalism in academia. It also was greatly informed by the post-Communist European Context in which many stateless nations emerged to rediscover national symbols and culture as the beginning of a long and painful process.

Banal Nationalist theory has been applied to many fields, making it applicable to this study. Scholars have analysed how banal nationalist ideas permeate the production of banknotes (cf Penrose, 2011), street naming practices (cf Centeno 2003), the way in which national culture is created in national museums (cf Levitt 2015) and patriotic flag displays (cf Skitka, 2005). But Szluc (2016) explores how banal nationalism can be applied to contexts where we might not expect to find nationalist displays in his comparative study of online LGBTQ literature in Poland and Turkey. Contrary to expectations an online space assumed to be hostile to ‘nationalism’ became a highly nationalised online space through banal nationalist tropes. Similarly, Peñaranda-Cólera & Gil-Juárez (2011) in their study of “Locutorios” (Internet Cafes in Barcelona), explore how banal flaggings occur in seemingly globalised spaces and Gulliver (2011) offers a study of Canadian English as Second Language Textbooks. Although it is argued that Canadians are less nationalist than other nations, the study showed the ubiquitous use of banal nationalist ideas, tropes and symbols.

Criticism

As McCrone (2006) reminds us, Billig did not intend that Banal Nationalism is only applicable to 'settled', i.e. established and stable western nations, rather he stresses how it is in settled contexts where banal nationalism is least obvious and least studied. However, because the theory focusses on 'settled nations' (Billig, 1995), studies of English-speaking societies dominate. What about recently settled nations in Eastern Europe? These are worthy of study because they contain many relatively homogenous nation states. Scholarship on Banal Nationalism diverges from that of 'Everyday Nationalism' in the sense that Banal Nationalism studies the way National identity is created through constant reminders, i.e. 'banal flaggings', whereas Everyday Nationalism diverts in its study of everyday displays of 'hotter' nationalism. Skey (2009;2011) has argued that Billig's work is the cornerstone of the "everyday nationalism".

Billig's theory may be inappropriate for highly diverse nations with high levels of immigration, since different groups of the population are likely to respond to banal presentations differently; a flag may go unnoticed to a citizen of that nation but not to a recent immigrant unfamiliar with seeing it on a daily basis (Maly, 2013). This jars with Billig's overwhelming focus on the banal nationalism of the United States, which is exactly such a population. Even within a supposedly cohesive group there are certainly difficulties: this perspective overlooks factions within states – or stateless nations within states.

In discussions of Banal Nationalism in the context of Scottish devolution and possible independence, this nationalism is suggested to be emancipatory rather than negative per se, as Billig asserts: "If the future remains uncertain, we know the past history of nationalism. And that should be sufficient to encourage a habit of watchful suspicion." (Billig, 1995, p177). In fact, normative assumptions that Nationalism is bad, and that banal nationalist practices are linked to 'hot' nationalist practices (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009, pp3-5). No admission of the value of cohesive national identities in preventing conflict. Similarly, majority of studies see national identities as 'top-down' and artificial impositions on communities (Brukbakker, 2000).

But how are these ideas contested by the citizens who are invited to reproduce them? The question is how do ideas formulated by elites evoke "meanings of the nation that resonate with salient public narratives" (Gvalia et al, 2014). There is the assumption that

norms, values and tropes are taken up blindly; what can we learn by seeing who and how these *banal flaggings* are contested?

Multilateralism, Banal Supranationalism and Stateless Nations

The theory may work well in the Estonian context, where the state is relatively homogenous but have shortcomings in other contexts, such as devolution in the UK or in supranational frameworks. Moreover, how might banal nationalism apply at different scales? If banal supranationalism and banal internationalism may also exist, how much is reasonably attributed to nationalism? Is it not simply a sub phenomenon of group identity rather than nationalism per se. This theme is debated by Petkova (2014) in a discussion of ‘banal europeanism’ and the existence of a European public sphere. How might Billig’s theory apply to Catalonia, a ‘stateless nation’ which now enjoys a large measure of autonomy? Limitation of the theory is that it may not be about national identity specifically – but could be applied at any scale. Whilst this is a limitation for the theory, this is a benefit for the study since it could be repeated at other scales: city and place branding; multilateral banality. In this sense it is little more than a theory of how group identity is maintained. There is nothing nationalist about it per se.

Exceptionalism, Self-orientation, Small-state Banal Nationalism

The dissemination of ‘virtue’ allows for narratives of exceptionalism: “The only power to which my country dares to pretend is that which is derived from right and equity, and if sometimes it thinks of greatness it is in proportion to the splendour of the causes to which it always devotes itself” (Vandenbosch, 1964, p.303). Creating a sense of ‘exceptionalism’ serves to define a state’s niche role in the international system (Browning, 2003, p.27). Nordic exceptionalism sought to chart a course between free-market and social-democratic models. Estonia champions fiscal prudence and GDP growth and other high-growth small states are described as ‘Tigers’ or ‘Tiny Tigers’. Originally used to refer to South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, the term has also been used for European small states such as Ireland: “The Celtic Tiger”, the Baltic ‘tiny tigers’ as well as Slovakia, the Tatra Tiger (Slovakia) (Browning, 2007, pp.46-48). Most recently the invest Romania slogan: ‘Romania, The European Tiger’ has employed similar tactics in Romania’s “Invest Romania” strategy (Ibid. p62). Is it still a niche if these are simply accepted norms – are these copycat states or ‘boutique nations’ after all? (Jansen, 2002, pp46-47).

The role defined for the state is often elite-led, rather than the result of bottom-up expression of national identity, argue Gvalia et al (2013, p42). Their case study of Georgia found that elite-level ideology could shape foreign policy projection effectively, even where this contradicts apparent economically rational arguments: They found that Georgia's 'pivot to Europe' was largely a creation of the Georgian political elite that went against the tide of natural economic activity in the early post-Soviet period but that this was essential for establishing Georgia's fervent European aspirations (Ibid. pp.103-105). Key messages were (1) Georgia as European; (2) Modernisation; (3) Reintegration with the West and NATO and other western security architectures (Ibid. pp.110-111). These findings are echoed by Cantir's study of the debates in Moldova where the path to Europe or remaining in Eurasia became a major fault line of domestic politics (Cantir, 2013, p.38).

Chapter 3: Research Design

Previous studies have analysed the end product, often favouring discourse or content analysis but since this study concerns the way banal nationalist ideas and tropes are negotiated and contested, this required collecting live data from participants to gauge the extent to which Nation branding materials can create a narrative to *shape hearts and minds*. To do this, this thesis analyses data collected from both the design and implementation processes, first looking at *how* the concepts detailed in Nation Branding campaigns are negotiated and secondly whether this is effective with their target audiences. The data collected to this end can be split into two groups of sources: A preliminary study of the production phases analyses *how* the campaign's intellectual content was negotiated and assembled through a series of semi-structured and unstructured interviews and a second study uses semi-structured interviews and a multi-dimensional mood survey to gauge how receptive participants are to the banal nationalist messages contained in the Nation branding materials. It considers which banal nationalist tropes were best received and why. Finally, this thesis reflects on practical considerations for states looking to produce branding materials.

Theoretical Map: Banal Nationalism

The concept of 'mapping' allows this study to assess how participants understand and respond to relatively complex topics and suits the relatively unstructured interview form. Moreover, after the experience of the initial study and interviews it became clear that allowing participants greater flexibility in responding to interview questions was vital; because of the different experiences of the participants, it was difficult to isolate the common themes across the data set, since many participants coded the same concepts radically differently and needed to answer on their own terms.

Billig's theory of Banal Nationalism (1995) forms the theoretical map for collecting and understanding the data collected. The topics discussed above will form the basis of my data analysis. The following ideas and concepts will form the basis of my semi-structured discussions with my interview participants, including (1) How are banal nationalist ideas contested? (2) How do different societal groups respond to banal flaggings? (3) Which norms and tropes are most effective with different participant groups? (4) How can non-national

tropes be converted into national tropes? (5) Does banal nationalism occur at other scales, i.e. supranational or subnational? (5) Is there any evidence that banal nationalism forms a continuum with 'hot' nationalism?

Case Study: Estonia

This study employs a single unit, non-temporal case study of Estonia's most recent 2017 Nation Branding Campaign, as defined by Gerring, including (a) the materials presented on Estonia.ee and (b) the Brand Estonia 'Brand Tool Box' (2004, p.343). The temporal bounds set to the period since the materials were produced and released (January, 2017). Since there is no temporal variation in the main study, my dissertation provides a snap shot of how the most recent Estonian Nation Branding Campaign was created, leading up to its publication in 2017 and then a snap-shot of how the campaign is perceived today. The research field was mostly Tallinn, but many participants were based internationally. The single unit case study suits the predictive approach that I apply to my research. Anchored in the experience of those involved in creating, designing and executing on the Nation branding materials, the case study aims to give a deep account of the phenomenon of how Nation Branding is executed by its stakeholders, exploring how and to what extent banal nationalist tropes are propagated. There is no reason that my work could not be expanded to the case of any state that seeks to brand itself, especially since my theoretical framework draws on a typology applicable to all states. For this reason, I offer a qualitative methodology that makes the study expandable to other contexts but maintain this single-unit in-depth perspective.

Whilst a single unit case study appears to lack representativeness it allows for the appreciation of unstructured, complex phenomena in providing 'thick description' (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). This is especially valid for studies of Nation Branding, which will always be informed by a myriad of historical events particular to a given country. Moreover, a multiple-unit case study would lose depth in understanding *the different ways* in which states can use Nation Branding campaigns to pursue their goals, rather than to draw similarities and comparisons. The interest in the Estonian case is the way that it breaks assumptions in the theoretical and empirical literature about what Nation Branding is. A comparison of, say, the three Baltic states' Nation Branding attempts would lose focus and detail. It would be less

valuable in achieving the goal of increasing the knowledge-base about how nation branding campaigns are used to build identity.

The case of Estonia was chosen because Estonia has invested the most heavily of its Baltic neighbours in Nation Branding since the 1990s, even during periods of budgetary restraint (Park, 2005, p. 181).⁸ Moreover, the campaign sets itself apart by appealing to both the international and domestic audiences, in a break from previous campaigns: the branding toolkit (brand.estonia.ee) invites ‘you’ (implied: Estonian citizen or resident) to share content about Estonia that reflects core messages defined by Enterprise Estonia. The project purports to be *bottom-up*, put together in consultation with stakeholders, making it an appropriate study to address issues accountability and corporatism raised in the empirical literature. Finally, the most recent branding campaign articulates a future vision of an Estonia that is more prosperous and prestigious. It is a vision of how to build a better country, a story that citizens can tell themselves to help them achieve this. Because of its teleological quality, it suggests that it was dense in meaning and a worthy study object.

Data Sources

This thesis contains two temporally distinct studies: (1) Semi-structured interviews (2) A multi-dimensional mood survey and semi-structured interview data. Moreover, the main study has a different focus, using the theoretical map of Banal Nationalism as well as adopting a more free, open interview style. The timeline for this research is as follows:

In light of this there were three research phases

1. Initial Study Interviews (January – March 2017)
2. Main Study Interviews (Mar – August 2017)
3. Main Study Multi-dimensional mood survey (December 2017 – May. 2018)

⁸ Park analyses data about employment within the Foreign Ministries of the Baltic States, highlighting the growing role of these ministries. Data runs until 2000. Interestingly, Estonia has a far smaller state than its neighbours, Latvia and Lithuania but employs far greater numbers in its foreign ministry in both absolute and per-capita terms.

Initial Study

My initial study comprises unstructured interviews (completed July, 2017) with mostly non-elite level participants across two categories: (a) stakeholders who were consulted when the key messages for the campaign were defined and (b) contractors who were employed to produce and design the materials, including graphic designers, photographers and visual design consultants. Questions focused on the structure and organisation of the production process of the most recent Branding Campaign running up to its publication in January 2017 as well as instructions and feedback received from EAS. The goal here was to establish the process by which the materials were put together and to establish the nature of overall control: was this a top-down or bottom-up campaign, or something in-between?

Because many studies assume that ‘the State’ is the dominant actor in producing materials without differentiating between different processes such as through tendering, competitions and commissions, I first establish the nature of control in the process of producing the study materials (Penrose, 2011). Then, through interviews with both elite and non-elite-level participants, explore how these ideas are received, contested and reproduced as well as exploring issues in the empirical and theoretical literatures. This address the emphasis on institutionalised discourses and reflects the way the campaign was ostensibly informed by both stakeholders (bottom up) and the central team at EAS (top-down). This approach gives greater insight into the concerns and debates expressed in the empirical literature as well as considering the *real-world* impact that these materials have on their audience: are they a powerful tool in identity construction for reproducing banal nationalist tropes - or simply another failed government-led project? It asks the central question: are Nation Branding Campaigns a viable and effective tool for identity construction? Do they have a meaningful impact on their audience, both domestic and foreign? What are the limits of what can be constructed in discourse?

Natural limit to those who chose to take part. There were eight substantive semi-structured interviews (see annex 2) and a further 27 calls with individuals who had a minor involvement in the project in the initial study. These conversations often revealed useful factual information related to workflow and project structure, but these did not function as interviews in their own right.

Main Study

The main study addresses a gap in Banal Nationalism studies: it answers the question are nation branding materials actually effective in shaping opinion among the local population or foreign audience? Scholars such as Billig (1995), and Jansen (2004) assert that citizens are receptive to these messages but is this really the case? Does Nation Branding turn everyone into a sales representative or ad-hoc ambassador (Dzenovska, 2004)? To what extent do citizens and residents contest the material they read?

The main study comprises quantitative and qualitative elements. The first part is a multi-dimensional mood survey in which participants record their emotional responses before and after viewing branding materials for around ten minutes according to a six-point scale. Participants identify their current mood across 30 key data points; they then review attached nation branding materials for ten minutes; finally, they review their mood across the same indicators. These include: Content; rested; restless; bad; worn-out; composed; tired; great; uneasy; energetic; uncomfortable; relaxed; highly activated; superb; absolutely calm; sleepy; good; at ease; unhappy; alert; discontent; tense; fresh; happy; nervous; exhausted; calm; wide awake; wonderful; deeply relaxed.

In the second part, participants rank to what extent they perceive the core values and assertions of the campaign to be accurate before and after viewing the branding materials for ten minutes. The citizen and non-citizen groups allow for a natural comparison. After initial survey responses, participants also have the option to offer additional thoughts on any aspect of the campaign.

The goal here was to see if Nation branding materials stimulate any response among participants, and whether this differs when results are compared, i.e. domestic and foreign participants, age groups and low vs high skill professions. In addition to this survey, survey respondents are invited to share any other comments or feedback regarding the 2017 Branding Campaign Materials. Some provided additional feedback or factual information that provided some additional insight, but survey respondents rarely provided substantive and detailed information. This approach promises new insights into the process of internal identity construction that Nation branding materials facilitate, considering how these reflect

elite concerns and the questions of accountability and historical accuracy (Gvalia et al, 2013, p42).

The qualitative element includes 25 in-depth elite-level interviews with individuals involved in the design and execution stages as well as members of the public :

Group One: Elite-level participants involved in creating the materials but not contractors (8);

Group Two: Elite-level participants delivering the message, including Brand Estonia representatives who actively promote Estonia using the tool box, or aspects of it or personnel using ‘Welcome to Estonia’ materials but not defunct elements of the former campaign (9);

Group Three: Members of the public who were familiar with the materials already.

These are not listed in an annex because of the nature of our conversations; key talking points were recorded on an interview note taking sheet and the audio was not recorded. Key quotations were written out where required. To collect a list of potential interviewees I employed several techniques, including analysis of reverse image searches of stock Brand Estonia photos to find authors who used materials, searching website source code to find use of the ‘Aino’ Estonian font taken from the Brand Estonia toolbox, data Gathered from online lists such as the credits section of brand.estonia.ee and reading secondary literature about Brand Estonia to find key actors as well as asking interviewees who was closely involved.

Finally, this data is supplemented by other data including statistics and comments provided by EAS spokespeople as well as documents and presentations reviewing the Brand Estonia materials.

Research Methods

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are best suited for showcasing “motives, feelings and intentions of interviewees and how they represent and interpret their own actions” (Weiss, 2004, p48). They allow flexibility – because my participants had varying involvement with

Brand Estonia - but adequate structure, allowing data collection in an natural setting, in a way that is mindful of how individuals interpret their social reality.

Semi-structured interviews were preferable to unstructured. Whilst unstructured interviews allowed interviewees to express their reality in their own terms in my initial scoping interviews, they did not provide data that can be compared with other data points. This would offer no valid data set and conclusions cannot be drawn in quite the same way. Unstructured interviews did not allow for the systematic investigation across a range of crucial to testing my hypothesis and I opted for semi-structured to remedy this. For example, unstructured interview data was useful to understand and reconstruct how the Brand Estonia materials were put together as part of my initial study: it allowed me to identify where the agenda setting power was held during the process and, by extension, to understand how to prioritise my interview participants to gather the most relevant results. The responses for this were not recorded per se, rather I included the key talking points of our conversation in my spreadsheet for future reference. This helped me build up a broader overview of how different actors were connected to the project and how their contributions shaped the end result.

Structured interviews presented the opposite problems to unstructured interviews: they were too restrictive because I was inquiring about someone's experience of a process and looking for features which stood out to them. There was not adequate room to pursue topical trajectories that may vary slightly between participants, with participants often interjecting with anecdotes and stories related to the material we were discussing. Whilst fully structured interviews would make data-analysis more straightforward, by comparing similarity in the responses but this would compromise on the depth and quality of the information. On the whole, this method is not appropriate to a qualitative study such as this. Similarly, email interviews were also too rigid. In the early stages of research, I attempted to collect some survey data by email but found that respondents provided shallow responses to my questions and there was little opportunity to probe further and to find more detail where this was necessary. The 'tennis approach' of emailing questions was not natural and provided shallow data.

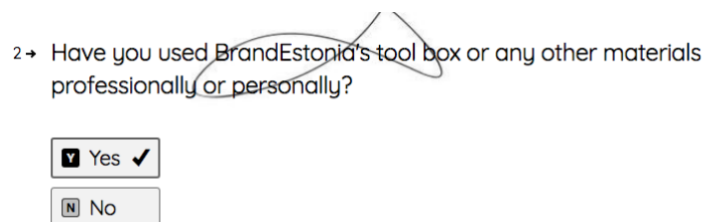
Because many of my participants were contractors or located across Europe and exceptionally busy, focus groups were simply not possible. Moreover, their involvement was often so varied that there was little chance of getting together people who had performed

similar roles to discuss their involvement together. Initially, survey data seemed a possible starting point because of its high representativeness over a large population, low costs and convenience, high statistical significance (over a large data sample) and “low observer subjectivity given that respondents are given identical stimulus for their responses” (Griffie, 2005, p.228). However, this method offered the same inflexibility of the structured interview and was unlikely to give data that was both accurate and rich: It said little about the ‘how’ of the process which interested me most, making it unsuitable as the only method.

I chose not to do discourse analysis or content analysis on interview data because previous research has favoured these methods and because I was interested in how my participants perceive the materials in real interviews since my previous telephone interviews had disappointed.

Multi-dimensional Mood Survey

The initial phase of the main study includes a multi-dimensional survey aimed to test participants responses and reactions to banal nationalist ideas, tropes and messages. Data collected here also informs the semi-structured interview questions conducted after this time. The main part of the questionnaire contains a survey across 30 data points aimed to see which feelings watching nation branding materials evokes as well as giving participants a chance to respond to the content of the materials in a free and less structured format, if they choose.



2+ Have you used BrandEstonia's tool box or any other materials professionally or personally?

☒ Yes ✓

☐ No

Fig 7.: Sample question, initial background questions from the survey

c. Which age group applies to you?*

<input type="radio"/> A 17 or younger	<input type="radio"/> B 18 to 24	<input type="radio"/> C 25 to 34
<input type="radio"/> D 35 to 44	<input type="radio"/> E 45 to 54	<input type="radio"/> F 55 to 64
<input type="radio"/> G 65 to 74	<input type="radio"/> H 75 or 84	<input type="radio"/> I 85 or older

Fig 8.: Examples of Data Stratification

The second part measures participant responses to key messages and ideas taken from the Brand Estonia ‘core messages’ and ‘story’ sections of the brand.estonia.ee website. It was essential to measure the extent to which these messages are received and contested by participants both before and after they view the materials for a period of ten minutes.

The questionnaire is coded so that negative terms can be inverted to quick calculations for later data analysis. I use a six rather than five-point scale as – after an initial trial of ten participants showed that people tended to simply choose 3 (visually in the middle) where they were hesitant.

6 → I feel **rested**

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

Fig. 9.: Sample question on six point scale

This reduced the accuracy of results, which have since been discarded. The second time, the elements are displayed in a different order to disrupt participant responses! Finally, “I feel” is repeated – I do not use “I now feel” as this could possibly be mildly leading question, encouraging participants to answer yes. Quantitative findings will be analysed using excel. Results are collected using Typeform and laid out as below. This lowers the barriers to entry – makes it as convenient as possible to encourage participation.

Sampling & Study Design

In summary the null hypothesis (H0) is that there will be no difference in reported emotions between citizens and non-citizens. The alternative hypothesis (H1): Citizens will be more receptive to nation branding materials than non-citizens, showing observable difference in reported emotions after viewing nation branding materials.

Since the potential audience for nation branding is global, obtaining a sample size large enough for a truly statistically significant result is not practical. In sharing the multi-dimensional mood survey, the target was 1000 responses. In total, I received 709. This is satisfactory assuming a population of 1,300,000, a 5% margin of error and a confidence level of 95%.

Research Governance

Anonymity and data security

Some participants were reluctant to give their personal data as many still worked with EAS or related projects. Given discussions related to working practices, meetings, drafting processes, I opted for anonymity as a constant to ensure that participants behaved consistently. People have the capacity to be dishonest or ‘partial responders’ where the subject matter is sensitive, and this involves maintain a safe and consistent interview environment (Catania et al, 1986; Gobo, 2008, pp.112-123). Data was stored on my personal computer with a secure password, rather than on a cloud or sever. I used ‘audacity’ and iPhone voice notes features to record my interviews where I had the permission of the participant, stored on my phone with a passcode. I used book.me to organise calls with my participants. This had the benefit of ‘professionalising’ the process and being convenient; participants felt that their time was respected. Invites were sent from a designated email address indicating my name and the purpose of the dissertation when inviting them to arrange a call or meeting. When a participant agreed to talk to me for an in-depth interview (see annex), I sent a digitally signed document that informed them of their right to withdraw and that showed I was committed to protecting their data. Survey data is collected and stored on Feedly servers at the Amazon Datacentre in Ireland.

Cultural Sensitivity

As an ‘outsider’ researcher, i.e. non-Estonian citizen conducting research on Estonia I initially considered this as a barrier to communication. However, interviewees were primarily highly educated individuals. Nevertheless, complicated notions of greatest interest; interviewees may leave details they struggle to articulate (Holland Edwards, 2013, p.2). It was therefore even more important to make sure that interviewees were at ease and that there were no barriers to them expressing their thoughts. Those I encountered who were engaged in promoting and using the Brand Estonia materials were highly receptive to me, since this

presented an opportunity to 'sell these to me'. I was perceived as an 'outsider' almost exclusively.

The Interview Environment

Many interviewees found it difficult to accommodate a full interview in person or by phone. They preferred 'email ping-pong'. This breaks the link between space and time in real-time verbal or face-to-face communication (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p.47). A relaxed environment was crucial to good quality data: skype or phone was a constant; but face-to-face interviews tended to be more intuitive and the data was always in more detail. In particular, I tried to arrange calls outside of work hours in light of Whilst Elwood & Martin's findings (2000) that answers differ significantly depending on the environment: in a workplace, participants were more likely to answer with the priorities of their employer rather than reflect on their own experiences. Each interview question allows me to draw a link between the empirical literature, the theoretical literature and the case study findings: 'Behind every question should be a hypothesis' (Wolcott, 2005)

Structure is crucial since the order of questions can affect subjects' responses greatly (Luker, 2008, pp.170-172). Beginning with simpler rapport-building and control questions that help the participant to remember the process of the activity which may be a distant memory, I then began to probe deeper with some topic-specific 'grand-tour' questions relating to my research themes. In the middle, once I felt the participant had begun to recall memories in greater detail, I asked the most detailed, challenging questions, leaving the interviewee to add as much detail as possible (Luker, 2008, p171). Often participants would answer the final questions, based on the theoretical map, focussing on one element.

Here I avoided the jargon related to political science. This was off-putting to people who did not understand their role in the project in the same terms as I did and could compromise results. This would likely impair the quality of the data I hoped to receive; my target audience were mostly marketing professionals and the public, rather than diplomats or foreign policy specialists and were less likely to perceive their work from the perspective of public diplomacy. In several pilot interviews interviewees noted that they were unaware of how the categories related to his/her work - and these seemed to put him/her off answering fully. On two of these occasions, when the participants were answering by email, they did not reply fully to these questions and preferred to do so over the phone.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Results

Results of Initial Study

I discuss the findings from initial research and the main interviews separately because these took place in different time periods. Moreover, the Initial research was primarily concerned with establishing the process by which the Nation branding materials were put together. Previous Studies have neglected establishing the exact nature of state control in the Nation Branding process. An initial study of how the materials are assembled is therefore necessary because it is not always clear that Nation branding materials are the direct product of ‘the state’; nor is it clear what exactly constitutes ‘the state’. Establishing the exact nature of control allowed for a clearer picture of who controlled the production process and who controlled the way the key messages were put together. This meant the main study to focus in on individual responses to materials and the messages they contain in greater detail. The initial study was conducted January to June 2017; included 26 phone calls with individuals who had some involvement with Enterprise Estonia or Brand Estonia but who did not have sufficient involvement to conduct full, unstructured in-depth interviews.

Many of these are not listed below in the annex because they contain limited information, pertinent to establishing facts and key names of other contractors involved. In the interests of privacy these names were noted privately and are not detailed here. At the time, I received few responses from those involved and few were interested in making comments about their involvement or the nature of others’ involvement, often because they still held positions connected to EAS or its partner organisations. Our brief conversation was centred around the nature of their involvement with any of the relevant agencies such as EAS or Brand Estonia and if they could recommend anyone as a partner to talk to about the most recent nation branding initiative.

Whilst participants were highly receptive to discuss the materials, especially where this related to their work, i.e. a typeface, graphic or layout that they had personally designed, few could name specific instructions as whether this was an explicit motivation of the EAS team. Many reported to key staff at EAS and the Instructions they received from the EAS team broached topics relating to Estonia’s state interests, mostly economy but also values connected to being ‘European’ and ‘Nordic’, these were not discussed in any meaningful

way: “I think that some of them were definitely important but it is hard to say that they were discussed so clearly.” – Participant 7.

With these participants I would often struggle to fill the note-taking template for many of the participants. Their involvement was often limited and they performed a highly outsourced and specialised task for which they had received very little feedback and could not answer questions or discuss topics in my theoretical map. Many of these people were listed on the ‘credits’ page of the Brand Estonia website but many were confused to be approached because they had such little involvement. This suggested that the bulk of the decision making was taken by a smaller, more concentrated group of individuals connected to the EAS team. Many named (1) Piret Reinson; (2) Alari Orav; (3) or Valdek Laur who held leadership positions at Enterprise Estonia at various stages during the campaign. The consistency with which people named these individuals suggests that they maintained a considerable degree of influence over the project. However, this in itself is an important finding, since it highlights the way control was maintained centrally, and key operational functions were outsourced but strategy was centrally controlled.

Whilst it was established that government agencies funded the project, it was not a foregone conclusion that they maintained ultimate control of the process. For example: did state agencies commission a project without any input, or did they outsource some elements but maintain ultimate control. In summary: interview data suggests that the process was tightly controlled in a highly vertical structure, with many parts outsourced to individual contractors and small companies but ultimate control resided with the EAS team.

However, when discussing the matter with a participant from EAS it became clear that these motivations were explicit and that notions of the state were actively discussed from the start. In fact, key figures within EAS maintained extensive normative control during the process of establishing the key messages and intellectual content of the materials:

Q: In your meetings with stakeholders, did you find that they contested the ideas put to them? - Did you change Brand Estonia materially based on their suggestions?

A: We were smart enough to leave the visual side to the absolute end of the project, so the discussion was regarding the basics, messages, core values, the platform itself. So, during these meetings we had of course some drawbacks and different opinions

but it's easier to have those without visuals and visual stuff. So, as all the most crucial part was negotiated in a very thorough way, it was much easier to show the stakeholders the visual side of the work. – Liisi Toots, Spokesperson at EAS.

Here the participant states explicitly that narrative was created 'in house' where as visual and design elements were outsourced. The content was formulated top-down and the design was bottom-up. To some extent, this finding mirrors Penrose's (2011) study of the design process for Scottish Banknotes, which identified a multiplicity of actors. However, the key difference is the balance in favour of state actors in determining the intellectual content of Nation Branding campaigns: it gives the impression of a bottom-up campaign whilst allowing for top-down control.

Note also that the promotional materials for the Estonian EU presidency were designed separately, suggesting that they fulfilled a different purpose. Moreover, when interviewing the same spokesperson, she gave the clear answer that these were two separate projects that were project managed completely separately: "Previously we have used the 'cross roads' idea where we discuss how Estonia has some eastern elements and some western elements but many people did not like this leading up to the EU presidency." – (Participant 7). Only two of the participants had been involved in previous branding initiatives. Participant seven noted some continuities with materials prepared for the EU Presidency but did not indicate that the three branding campaigns and EU presidency campaign were directly connected.

Stakeholder Engagement

Understanding the extent to which citizens had to influence the process was crucial to establishing the true nature of control. As noted above, the EAS spokesperson notes how control of key messaging was decided in house at the elite level and then put to key stakeholders. Here it was essential to establish to what extent citizens *contested* the materials put to them and to what extent they had the power to change them (Billig, 1995). If interview data showed that the key messages contained in this campaign reflected the views of ordinary citizens it would not be a banal nationalist campaign of elite ideas at all, and the theoretical framework would not be appropriate. However, discussions with stakeholders involved in the

limited meetings with EAS staff showed that they had only limited possibilities to discuss the messages and that these discussions brought about no meaningful change in the materials.

Contractors were selected by EAS actors and commissioned. There was no open tender or national competition to select them. Contractors I contacted stressed that they were approached and did not bid for the work themselves. This is opposed to the findings of Penrose's study of the tender process for banknote design, where all willing actors were free to bid for the work and where there was little central control over the process (2011, 432). Where Penrose notes that the "tendency to invoke the state as key architect and beneficiary of national imagery on official products, like money and stamps, is seldom accompanied by any indication of how the state is being conceptualized", we can say that in this case the circle of controlling actors from EAS was small, they nonetheless exerted considerable control. There was a highly vertical reporting structure with contractors reported having a 1-on-1 reporting relationship to EAS staff; they received valuable feedback but had minimum contact with other contractors and reported feeling *kept in the dark* about what happened in this process (Ibid., 2011, 432). This reflects the stated purpose of the materials "to enable people and companies to better fulfil their role as ambassadors, Enterprise Estonia has put together [the] Introduce Estonia toolbox, as part of the national marketing concept" but does not make them co-producers of the end product (Mändmets, 2010, p.76).

Interviews with participants of stakeholder focus groups showed that they did contest certain ideas that did not resonate with them, but that they were unable to materially alter the content and direction of the campaign. Interviewees noted how the process was led 'from above', with limited opportunity for stakeholders to influence content. Participants expressed frustration at how the materials were not a faithful representation of Estonia as they know it but how Estonia wanted to be, as defined by elites:

"[The feedback] we received that we needed to stay *on message* [emphasis added] about the internet and the environment" – Participant 4

"The EDM made the first draft. [...] The main concept was introduced, and we could argue if we agreed or not, some things or mostly wordings were changed in brainstorming sessions." – Participant 2

There was a consensus from both interview data and information gathered during scoping phone calls that “[many] people were contractors and there were only a few people really leading and directing the project.” - Participant 6. This gave the impression that a wide group of participants had been consulted but control remained higher ‘up the chain’. This was a view that was reinforced by a more senior colleague commented that: “they had some quite clear ideas about some motifs [e-Estonia & Norms related to Environment] they would use to write the stories, so I didn’t change it too much [during her time working with EAS].” (Participant 8). Moreover, she was also very aware that many of those invited to the stakeholder groups were largely unaware about how such things work – they expressed confusion and offered limited input, often only changing minor details of the materials (Participant 8).

Note also that the vast majority of stakeholders consulted by the EAS team were from a professional background, living either in Tallinn or Tartu – or based abroad. They were chosen and asked to participate as leaders in their fields, rather than inviting a random or representative sample of the population. These represented five groups: “enterprises involving foreign investments including start-up sector, tourism enterprises, the public sector, exporters including culture exporters and also Estonia’s physical and virtual points of entry – „gateways“ – Liisi Toots. Again, of these the majority were ethnically Estonian, with fewer than 4% russophone Estonians but with a considerable number of ex-pats or foreign consultants (7%) according to the ‘credits list’ on the Brand Estonia website. This reflects Jansen’s concerns that elites continue to define the intellectual content of Nation branding materials (Jansen, 2004). This is also a finding reflected in the survey data performed in this thesis. Whilst the survey link was shared through social media and was theoretically open to any participant, it gained traction predominantly among professional circles and those that spoke good English, were involved in *the knowledge economy* or the *digital economy*. Gaining insight from a truly representative sample remained a difficult task.

Participants did not show any consensus on whether they liked the materials. In particular, two responses stood out as criticising the Campaigns over focus on the future, rather than representing Estonia as it is:

“I think it captures some of Estonia – or the future of Estonia but I worry we are overselling ourselves in this campaign. Maybe people find out that things aren’t so good and they will be disappointed.” – Participant 2.

“For them Tallinn is the new Hong Kong – or cheap Sweden or something like this – I don’t believe it so much but I know what they are going for and it is good that they [EAS] are trying [...] maybe Estonia is strategically small- like the little Delaware [...] but not so much for Estonians. I don’t want to say it’s not true, what they say, but also – it is not perfectly true” – Participant 8

Both participant two and eight reflected similar concerns about how the notions and values reflected in the campaign did not match their own experiences. These two interviews, conducted at different industry events revealed a certain level of pessimism about the content of the materials even among a key demographic of business people who were the intended target. The materials here even did not quite resonate with them. This reflected negative findings about how the materials were not shared much outside of government circles who were incentivised to ‘stay on message.

When consulting with an EAS spokesperson on this negative reception, we discussed the failure of the campaign to gain traction with a wide range of users:

“After the new tools to introduce Estonia were launched, media and public opinion was quite critical about the work, but a year later when we asked the feedback from various users (designers, ministries, alliances and clusters) to comment on the use of the brand and bring out things that need to be corrected), the feedback was mainly positive” – Liisi Toots

However, even in the post-production phase, EAS did not consult on the content, only on the presentation and design, soliciting feedback only on the superficial aspects of the campaign. This was reflected in the outcome where the majority of companies to use the full branding were state institutions and national champion companies who were incentivised to do so: “nearly 70 organizations and companies, including the Office of the President of the Republic of Estonia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Estonian Defence

Industry Association, the Estonian Food Industry Association, the Estonian Furniture Manufacturers Association, the Tallinn Port, the Estonian Jazz Union, the Connected Health cluster” - Liisi Toots.

One of the key aspects of the Brand Estonia toolbox was to allow users to submit their own material, capitalising on the popularity of Nation Branding practitioner Peter Kentie’s popularity. However, the EAS spokesperson was not able to confirm a single submission from the public that had been actively used in the current materials, further indicating that this remains a top-down project.

Whilst “some institutions” had submitted photos and materials to the toolbox.estonia.ee portal, the spokesperson even admitted that this “had been largely unsuccessful”. Moreover, the focus on submissions from citizens is largely about design and presentation with little room to influence narratives:

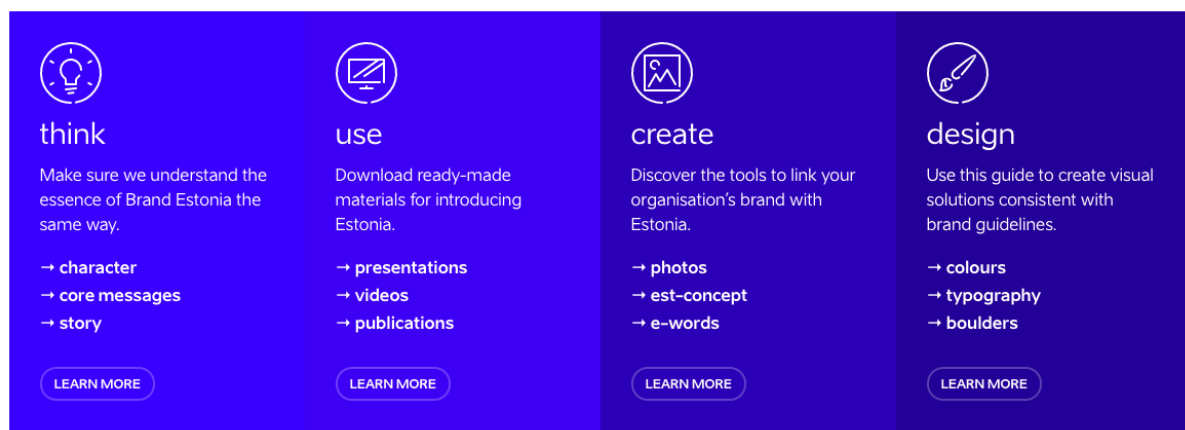


Fig. 10.: Four key elements of the Brand Estonia tool box resource: Users are encouraged to ‘stay on message’, adhering to predefined elite-level ideas.

There is limited secondary data available to establish the genuine popularity of the materials and to what extent these gained traction with different societal groups. Web traffic clearly where the data for site visits and downloads of relevant materials measured over 157,000 visits to estonia.ee, brand.estonia.ee as well as toolbox.estonia.ee and then circa 11,433 downloads of materials at the time of writing:

"After the new web has been released, the number of applicants from the web of e-residents has grown from 0.5% to 2.7% as a result of multi-factor synergy. For example, if there are 10,000 web visitors per month, then 50 users used to join, but now joined 270. Moreover, the NPS score has increased from +37 to +49 and the web has a huge role to play in selling well. " Liisi Toots, EAS.

Smallness and Banal Nationalism

Many mentioned Estonia's small state size as a factor, whether this was actively discussed as a topic, or something as a basic assumption. This appeared to be a factor that increased the readiness of participants to engage with the materials because of a perceived need :

"Being small, you have to be smart and think strategically Resources are limited and promotion is expensive - it's more than just Facebook - I know this from my work that it takes lots of time and resources to market something properly." – Participant 3

This was in-line with expectations, reflecting Talberg & Mari's study of strong self-awareness of smallness (2000). No participant challenged the assumption that Estonia's state size necessitated its use of Nation Branding to differentiate itself. In fact, smallness was articulated as both a reason that Estonia needed to brand itself but also as a strategy in itself: smallness is a nuanced form of "intangible power" since it is both a response to a perceived vulnerability and a strategy to counteract this same vulnerability (McLuhan, 1974 pp. 51-53). Therefore, states can parade their 'smallness' as a strategy to gain the trust of other actors in the international arena.

By extension, participants felt exceptionalism and were keen to point out Estonia's relative strengths:

"That was why we were doing this and why they invited us there. America does not need to do this but we do." – Participant 2.

"But I truly think and hope that if we take it seriously, this toolbox will be a very good "window"/"tool" for all of us in any business to get people to know Estonia" –

Participant 4

This found expression in the use of metaphors connected to relative performance. Many of those participants used narrative devices related to the voice or being heard to express a need for Estonia to be promoted in order for it to survive. There was a general willingness to cooperate because it could bring tangible benefits and participants saw themselves as ‘brand ambassadors’ for their country, correctly reflecting its intended purpose: “to enable people and companies to better fulfil their role as ambassadors, Enterprise Estonia has put together [the] Introduce Estonia toolbox, as part of the national marketing concept” (Mändmets, 2010, p.76).

Contained in this is a distinctly small state challenge: Nation Branding practitioners must stress their differences to market themselves as unique (Jansen, 2004), yet display themselves as compatible enough to form part of a coherent group amongst the great powers (Knudsen, 2002, p. 81). Here the respondent identifies a highly de-nationalised theme of company formation that is bound up with movements of global capital, multi-national firms and foreign investors and transforms it into a banal nationalist trope. Several other participants in both live interviews and surveys mentioned this in a positive respect; those in live interviews were animated and highly positive when discussing the speed and ease with which you can use Estonian digital services. In this sense the practices of promotional activities differ little between place and nation branding, (Skinner, 2008): that is to say branding is branding, regardless of scale (Anholt, 2007, p52).

Deixical referents

Participants frequently used deixical referents, especially ‘we’ and ‘us’ when discussing their work and participation. This was often combined with the metaphor of ‘speaking with one voice’, juxtaposed against the ‘Estonia is a place for independent minds’. In fact, almost all participants used the language of ‘one voice’ or ‘speaking for Estonia’, indicating a strong preoccupation with ‘being heard’ and being seen by others; they had discussed the importance of ‘being on message’ and creating a united campaign, which would be typical for a small homogenous state where this is possible:

“We used this tool box on our own initiative because we wanted to have a single voice and to attach ourselves onto the brand and we thought it was good. That was important for us in our role in securing Estonia as a tourist destination for conferences. We are a small country and we need to have a unified strategy or voice.”

– Participant 4

The majority (seven) of these participants were noticeably animated when discussing the materials: despite conducting several these interviews by phone, where their body language was not visible, there was a noticeable change in the timbre and pitch of the voice, with many participants increasing the speed of the voices. Only two participants showed no real change in pitch, timbre or speed, indicating a general disinterest. The frequent use of deixical referents combined with animated responses suggests participants responded positively to the Nation branding materials and that these were successful in building a “what we are” identity as well as the assumption of a “homogenous national audience” (Skey, 2009, p. 335).

Summary of key initial findings

In total, the process was less ad-hoc than might be expected, reflecting Penrose (2011) and Price (2015)’s finding that state functions are completed by a complex web of state and non-state actors, such as NGOs, freelancers and contractors. With regard to the question of power and accountability, it was shown that the Nation Branding campaign reflected Jansen’s criticisms, namely that one narrative must be prioritised over others and that this overwhelmingly favours those voices which are either connected or profitable: “You can’t tell everyone’s story” – Participant 8. Moreover, those involved in creating the materials were overwhelmingly from unrelated fields, they were unlikely to be aware of the historical nuances in what they were doing as a practice. The dominance of the corporate branding mind-set shone through in the following quotation: “I did not even take so much interest in the project if I am honest because for me it was just another project in my portfolio.” – Participant 4.

Finally, Brand Estonia 2017 listed a large number of stakeholders, many of whom had no meaningful connection to the Branding Process. This disguises the limited number of actors who shaped the campaign and illustrates the presence of concentrated elite interest

groups that are highly concentrated and coordinated (Katzenstein's, 2000, p.439). In the Estonian case, participants who took part in focus groups reported feeling limited input into the process. However, whilst stakeholders and contractors were invited to give their views, it was not clear that their input was any more than a rubber stamp of approval of topics that had been pre-approved by the EAS team: control remained in the hands of the EAS team who commissioned the work and conducted the stakeholder engagement groups. Few of the participants had been involved in other Brand Estonia campaigns and stakeholders and contractors seemed to be chosen on a project basis. The following themes emerged in responses from stakeholders and contractors.

Results of Multidimensional Mood State Questionnaire

The data element was designed to test reported changes in key emotions after viewing the materials for a period of ten minutes. This is intended to determine whether the materials stimulate any meaningful response in the participant group of 709. This mimics the common ‘brand audit’ method often used in the marketing industry to gauge a product’s market penetration and reach. This methodology seemed appropriate given the way the campaign was put together according to practices that echo corporate marketing.

It was expected that more citizens and residents than foreigners would report stronger changes in mood as well as being more receptive to key messages and values that were put to them (H1). However, the opposite was true. Non-citizens reported a great change in mood after viewing the Nation branding materials for a period of ten minutes. In fact, non-citizens showed a statistically significant mood change in 28 of 30 reported emotions, compared to 21 of 30 in the citizen group. Moreover, when offered the chance to elaborate on these results through an online form, many participants who identified as citizens chose to express negative sentiments regarding the materials and showed a greater tendency to contest the notions put forward. Critiques matched those in interviews, mostly (a) Pessimism about who is represented in the materials: seven survey responses mention that the lifestyle presented is very much a Tallinn thing as well as (b) pessimism surrounding the difficulty to shed negative capital associated with ideas about transition.

However, it is notable that both groups reported feeling less calm, rested and at ease, despite reporting other positive emotions, suggesting that viewing the materials made them more animated. Viewing nation branding materials showed an increase in positive sentiments in both Estonian and non-Estonian respondents. After viewing branding materials, all participants reported a slight but general increase in, say, energy, motivation and composure and a corresponding decrease in negative emotions in most cases:

Adjectives 1-6 scale	Before (Native)	After (Native)	% Change	Before (Non- Native)	After (Non- Native)	% Change
Worn out (-)	3.63	2.97	-18.18%	3.01	2.54	-15.61%
Bad (-)	1.54	1.43	-7.14%	2.21	2.34	5.88%
Tired (-)	3.17	2.97	-6.31%	3.37	2.85	-15.43%

Unhappy (-)	2.36	2.01	-14.83%	2.01	1.54	-23.38%
Uneasy (-)	2.62	2.56	-2.29%	2.17	1.84	-15.21%
Energetic (+)	3.19	3.54	-10.97%	3.01	3.24	+7.64%
Happy (+)	2.05	2.24	+9.27%	2.36	2.53	+7.20%
Wide-awake (+)	3.64	3.41	-6.32%	3.43	3.91	+13.99%
Wonderful (+)	3.16	3.44	+8.86%	3.35	3.81	+13.73%

Table. 2.: extract of data set comparing statistically significant changes in reported mood in participants.

Participant responsiveness to ‘core messages’ and ‘story’ revealed that both groups were likely to rate the statements taken from ‘core messages’ and ‘story’ as more true following viewing the nation branding materials for ten minutes. Again, the greatest percentage change in responses was observed in the non-citizen group, where participants reported a great swing, especially in respect to the key values of Nordic, Independent Minds and Clean Environment. In particular, citizens showed the least change in those values and markers that reflect personal qualities of their citizens, indicating a skepticism about materials that tried to sell values that contradicted their own personal experience.

Tech-savvy	3.16	3.44	8.86%	4.25	4.69	10.35%
Estonia is the first country to function as a digital service. Our citizens and e-residents can get things done fast and efficiently. A number of world-renowned technology companies were born in Estonia and the nation boasts more thriving start-up companies per capita than anywhere else in Europe.	4.75	5.08	6.95%	3.19	3.64	14.11%
Three minutes to file your taxes	3.24	3.51	8.33%	4.05	4.14	2.22%
Most entrepreneurial country in Europe	4.63	5.37	15.98%	4.64	4.63	-0.22%

Table 3.: Extracts from Multi-dimensional mood data survey

Norms attached to notions of the digital society were best received. Interview data suggests that these are the least contentious and that both citizen and non-citizen groups were highly receptive to these messages. Interestingly, non-citizens showed a greater swing toward digital norms, whereas citizens remained more constant around the original figure.

Limitations

A limitation is that many participants scored around three or four for the mood survey. This could suggest some confusion about the purpose and what was expected by the survey, especially since results for responses to the ‘core messages’ and ‘story’ items showed greater variance. With respect to ‘core messages’ and ‘story’ these values were all positive. Could it be more likely that people would agree with positive statement, and that therefore these results were consistently higher. In both data relating to ‘core messages’ and ‘story’ both groups gave higher averages scores.

The following items were not included as they appeared to represent facts, and this would make it difficult for participants to offer the opinions on a scale of 1-6 as to whether they were correct:

- 51% of Estonian territory is covered with forests
- 45% of the Estonian forest is organic collection area
- 17% of our farmland is organic
- 22% of our country is wildlife preserves
- From any point, the nearest marsh is always less than 10 km away.
- The first country in the world to offer e-residency
- The first country in the world to vote online

However, subjective judgments were included even where these appeared to represent facts:

- Three minutes to file your taxes
- Most entrepreneurial country in Europe

Discussion of Additional Results:

In this section, I reflect on insights from the data gathered and supplement this with data from additional semi-structured interviews. The dominance of elite-level ideas in shaping Nation branding materials suggests that Nation branding materials are a valuable study object in political science: like a state visit, they are highly crafted and are rich in symbolic meaning. They serve as repositories for domestic and foreign policy concerns of states as well as the aspirations of a country's elite – or its people. They can never simply be a strategy to boost tourism or increasing FDI outcomes, because they are naturally bound up in the Nation building process.

First this study established how the campaigns were put together: it was found that the Estonian case involved a high level of central control in the planning stages, with a small group of EAS staff setting the tone from the top and stakeholders offered some but limited scope to alter the messages and materials presented. Interviews with participants of these stakeholder focus groups showed that they did contest certain ideas that did not resonate with them, particularly those ideas that were deemed elite-level ideas. However, they were unable to materially alter the content and direction of the campaign. In this sense, the materials remain an expression of mostly elite-level ideas, rather than a bottom-up expression of nationhood. Finally, the vast majority of stakeholders consulted by the EAS team were from a professional background. They were chosen and asked to participate as leaders in their fields, rather than inviting a random or representative sample of the population. Again, of these the majority were ethnically Estonian, with fewer than 4% russophone Estonians but with a considerable number of ex-pats or foreign consultants (7%).

Secondly, data sources were used to evaluate Nation branding materials as a medium for disseminating banal nationalist tropes and ideas. It was shown that whilst, the Nation branding materials studied here do more than give factual information or legitimise the national space, they “teach the emotions one should feel” about Estonia and attempt to shape the terms of debate with limited effect (Penrose, 2011). It was shown that whilst the presentation of a lifestyle that should be associated with residency or citizenship is effective at promoting existing norms, there is limited scope to invent new tropes and values that do not already resonate with the target audience. Finally, the most interesting finding was the way norms, ideas and tropes that are not local to Estonia per se but have been appropriated as

niche role conceptions were some of the most effective at creating identity among participants. In the section below I detail several themes around which identity was most successfully conveyed.

There are clear limitations to what can be imposed top-down on citizens and to what can be constructed from discourse: “[...] consistency of message cannot be enforced; and in the era of the internet and satellite technologies, even totalitarian regimes cannot fully control information flows.” (Jansen, 2004, p.81). Whilst Nation branding materials are powerful and rich in meaning, there is limited scope to affect a new national consciousness in either the foreign or domestic audience. Again, although Estonia’s Nation Branding efforts continue to be somewhat successful in encouraging users to share materials about Estonia in the way that creators of the campaign would like, there is no evidence that messages disseminated ‘from above’ will be accepted and shared. This is particularly relevant given current concerns about media today: are citizens and residents of countries malleable that they can they be manipulated by messages contained in media or branding campaigns? (Jansen, 2004, p.81) How do citizens respond to these messages? What are the limits to constructivist tools ability to shape public opinion? Is this sort of campaign the type of nation branding campaign that will overtake public diplomacy as “the dominant channel of communication for national identity” (Anholt, 2003, p. 139)⁹.

In essence: Brand values must resonate with personal values for campaigns to gain traction (cf Edensor, 2002). Citizens and users are not passive and will contest values and ideas presented to them that do jar with their experiences. In particular, one interviewee noted that:

“Looking back over the story it does make me feel pride but I wonder if they're trying to oversell our achievements. Everyday life here is not so different from other countries really. I guess this is reality only some of the time. It looks like our Instagram life not real life.”

⁹ EAS’ own review of their toolbox indicated it had been less successful than P. Kentie’s EST concept, a private branding tool that had received no state backing, rather it had simply grown popular through social media. It was used mainly state agencies, related bodies and larger corporates and has been used at 27 trade fairs in 2017 (ERR, March, 2018). Respondents’ comments echoed those from this thesis’ initial research: many rejected its claims that Estonia was already a digital pioneer or that Estonia was an environmental leader, as was reflected in the initial research for this paper. It also coincided with news that Estonia’s position on several key rankings had fallen.

Since practitioners are interested in tying their *product* to a coherent set of values propositions desirable to their audience, a Nation Branding campaign will always paper over the cracks of societal divisions (Stahlberg & Bolin, 2015). However, these issues were contested by interviewees and survey respondents consistently. Here there is the implicit acceptance that the materials are conveying a reality, or at least a selective and partial version of that reality. Whilst the interviewee states their emotion plainly (pride), they are quick to contest the reality of what is portrayed and critical of its selective, social-media style presentation of life as the interviewee knows it. Even using the language of ‘story’ is a tacit admission of the social-media presentation of reality that is expected as something that grows organically with updates and minor changes over time. In this sense, the latest concept is not a snapshot in time but a means of narration in conveying the values of Estonia’s story, echoing current practice in commercial marketing like a social media feed, that these are best represented through “incremental changes in the nation’s understanding in the broader population” (Penrose, 2011, pp13,14).

In particular, visual imagery and video proved most essential to disseminating banal flaggings of Estonia, with a mixture of cityscapes and natural imagery, reflecting “the importance of geographic space in perpetuating national frames of reference” even though majority lived in urban areas (cf Edensor, 2002). These were vital factors in presenting a lifestyle that matched individual values:

"I think the brand created by EAS is lovely, clean Nordic, clear, fresh, courageous, philosophical and well thought out. The toolbox looks smart and good. "

- Tiia Nightingale, Coordinator of the United Nations Security Council Campaign,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Even city dwellers were quick to point to nostalgic childhood experiences or time spent in the country. The presentation of tropes of the landscape is somewhat at odds to the cyber and digital norms promoted. The depictions of land and cityscapes act as a counterweight to the “borderless, placeless, and apolitical” quality of the cyber norms, suggesting that Estonia’s citizens have a strong connection to the land (Aronczyk, 2014). This was echoed in one participant who noted the way maps of “Northern Europe” were presented in the campaign at how this had been a topic of intense discussion: how exactly should maps be presented? Should they crop out Russia to the east, showing Estonia as the Eastern most part of Europe,

or centre Estonia as the centre of its own world, appealing to a cross-roads motif. These seeming banal discussions are highly relevant in showing how charged each of the features of the campaign are and how they represent state concerns.

Post-Nationalist Banal Nationalism & Banal Internationalism

The absence of National Flag displays in a supposedly national campaign is striking. This subverts our understanding of the way national identity can be presented. Commenting on the design process, one participant noted how he had been given feedback that he should “stay on message [by avoiding the use of] flags”. In fact, he noted that “I think they were trying not to talk about this so much. In the materials they didn’t even want Estonian flags. All the stories are about Estonia but it could be somewhere else and it could be anyone.” (Participant 1). The choice to avoid national flags was confirmed as an overt strategy by an EAS spokesperson:

Q: Was there a conscious decision not to use Estonian flags overtly on Estonia.ee, brand.estonia.ee, toolbox.estonia.ee domains?

A: Yes, it was. As our platform provides you with overall tools, we didn’t look for the one sign or element. It doesn’t mean that we won’t use it e.g. on products – Liisi Toots

The exact motivation for this was not given. One participant suggested that a previous idea about Estonia’s position between East and West was discounted and considered unfitting because “Previously we have used the ‘cross roads’ idea where we discuss how Estonia has some eastern elements and some western elements but many people did not like this leading up to the EU presidency.” – (Participant 7).

Tropes and values that appeared to be the least nationalist resonated most with interviewees: imagery depicted a lifestyle and appealed to personal values: family life, careers, enjoying time with friends and family, spending time outdoors, using the internet and living in a highly interconnected world. It is striking that there is nothing Estonian about any of these things per se, rather the Nation branding materials depict Estonia as a place where *you* can do these things but these were the most effective elements of flagging identity. Far

from being “borderless, placeless, and apolitical”, the everyday is enmeshed with grander notions of state ideas. Slippers, traditional slippers and images of familiar scenery are as much transformed into markers of identity as powerful as flags or crests (Aronczyk & Budnitsky, 2017). These images are interspersed with images that depict a teleological vision for Estonia, including images that convey Estonia’s successful transition and reintegration in Europe as well as Estonia’s achievements in the world:

"There is one thing that shows [a] man putting on slippers. This is quite unique to the Slavic countries and I think that many of the citizens can relate to this. This is very simple. They show people making tea, going to work, making food, and spending time with friends and family. They also show working people and daily life, the byt [Russian: daily life] there are lots of technology. They trying to show achievements and strengths in the world.” - Semi-structured Interview #2

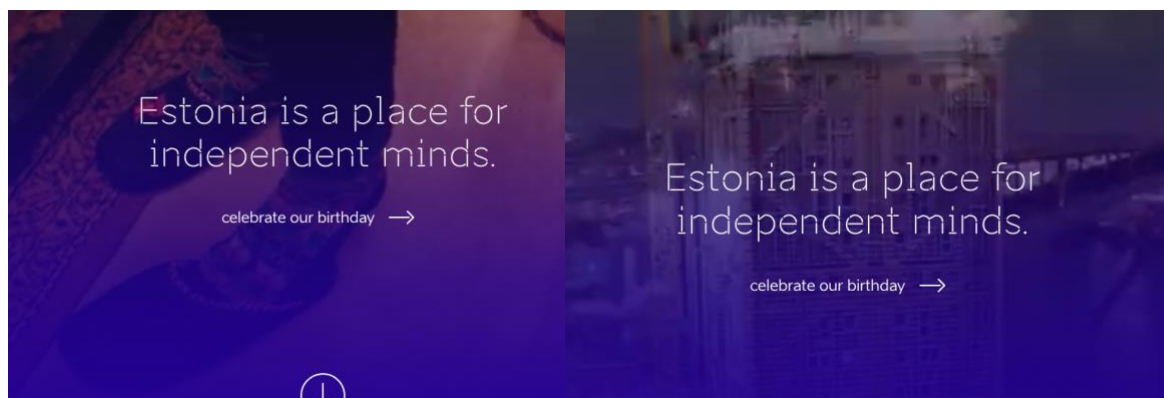


Fig 11.: Two frames taken from Estonia.ee video. A woman puts on traditional slippers as part of a typical morning routine (left). A video of a multi-storey building is repeated three times throughout the short film, interspersed between other frames (right).

In particular participants frequently noted (a) Speaking English, (b) being ‘borderless’, and (c) ‘digital’. These norms resonated well with a range of participants, often invoking animated and positive responses:

“Yes, this is the fastest place to open the business in Europe. This is one of our great achievements. You can even do it in three minutes” – Anon. Survey response.

“Yes this is a digital society - this is an obsession.” Annon, Survey

In total, evidence suggested that banal flaggings of seemingly globalised tropes and ideas play a role in evoking “the mythology of the Internet as a post-national realm”, whilst at the same time instrumentalizing it to produce national identity (Aronczyk, 2017).

But not necessarily with all, who often identified the way materials displayed banal nationalist tropes applicable only to a select group:

Do you feel that the materials presented online are an accurate representation of Estonia? Give reasons for your answer?

A: “They represent Tallinn life - not all of Estonia. They are showing the ideal new Estonian lifestyle here” – Main study Interviewee

Highlights the issue with Billig’s theory that there is no cohesive ‘us’, even within a distinct ethnic group (Skey, 2009). Nevertheless this reflected the targeted social groups, perceived as ‘brand steerers’ (Dinnie, 2008) that would be best place to disseminate the values and tropes reproduced in the campaign: in this sense it is less than a marketing campaign and more of a strategy for instructing others on performing marketing activities on their behalf (Ibid).¹⁰ These groups were elites in their access to social capital and their interests are favoured in the materials (cf Jansen, 2004, p. 27).

More specifically, participants showed pride at fulfilling a role within multi-lateral frameworks and alliances or performing niche role conceptions: participants showed pride in Estonia or the Baltic states as a whole militarily, in finance or technology and in being ‘good Europeans’ or norm entrepreneurs. Even citizens tended towards almost public relation style answers and were visibly enthused to share *promotional facts* about Estonia:

¹⁰ See also Vergo & Chernatony (2006) for a discussion of the role of ‘brand-steerers’ in disseminating marketing and nation branding materials.

“Estonia offers digital healthcare where patients can be issued medical prescriptions without the use of paper. Filing taxes can also be made electronically and digital signature has been widely used since 2002.” – Anon survey

This reflected the ‘boutique nations’ concept proposed by Jansen (2004, p.72). The ability to lead on issues such as NATO defence spending targets, cyber security norms and consolidating the European single market is especially relevant for small states. Moreover, this was deemed especially necessary for Estonia because of its smallness. Moreover, pride in participation in multilateral frameworks showed another seemingly transnational concept turned into a social and political space (cf Kuss, 2002, p9 & Gvalia et al, 2016, pp.34,35). Membership functions as a marker of prestige, *Westernness* and *Europeanness*, as found by Browning, 2002 & Moisio, 2003). In fact, this suggests differentiation by association, since respondents were keen to point out their membership of a prestigious group of nations. Roles are increasingly detached from geography. Estonia and Singapore's strengths in *fintech* tie it closer to the City of London than to Latvia. It has more in common with the US state of Delaware, Panama or Cyprus as a low-tax hub for company registration than to a set of specifically regional interests.¹¹

Interviewees quickly picked up on the post-national aspect of the campaign; the tropes depicted functioned as a means to create a sense of exceptionalism; whilst they weren't strictly Estonian, per se, they were metrics for measuring Estonian success, as if reaffirming its viability as a state:

"This is just the everyday life - or the best part of it. There is no flag in this campaign as we talked about but I think it is significant that the images in the campaign I'll have a filter. As if the blue black and white colours of the flag are still there and even though they show universal images of daily life that could just also be any other country they are given a Estonian flavour.”-Semi-structured Interview" #5

In this interview, the interviewee, who had a marketing background, was quick to point to colour, imagery and the ‘filmic’ quality of the Estonia.ee home page.

¹¹ Thomas Illves’ famous ‘Yuletide Speech’ draws upon these themes, in particular the norms of European-ness, North-European-ness and norms relating to economic development. Crucially, the Yuletide speech draws attention to the absurdity of grouping countries by their geography, rather states can be part of a wider idea of statehood.

Hot Nationalism

Furthermore, the evidence undermines the ‘wedge’ theory that banal nationalism forms a continuum with ‘hot’ nationalism. While lacunae in studies which describe both the practice of Nation Branding and Banal Nationalism as ‘insidious’, this study suggests that Nation Branding has the potential to present a teleological, myth-making vision that a country can strive for, enabled by the collective presentation of banal visual imagery, national symbols and banal nationalist tropes (cf Billig in Aronczyk, 2017; Jansen, 2004). Contrary to Billigs’ suggestion that Banal and Hot Nationalism are on one spectrum, there is no evidence of a wedge leading to ‘hot’ nationalism. In fact, survey data on respondents reported feelings showed a small increase in positive emotions such as inspiration, motivation and confidence in both domestic and foreign audiences. Survey responses frequently cited national pride and made frequent use of markers such as ‘we’ or ‘us’ but there was no statistically significant evidence of an increase in any negative emotion.

There was not one participant who displayed any tendencies for ‘hot’ nationalism. It was hard to see that Billig’s warning that the banal nationalism in this campaign requires “watchful suspicion” (Billig, 1995, p177). In fact, the materials were likely to invoke positive emotion; participant responses showed a emancipatory quality that was conducive to a positive and cohesive national identity, especially where values articulated in the study materials coincided with the participants own personal values or beliefs (cf Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009, pp3-5; Brukbaker, 2000; Condor, 2000). By contrast, participants expressed highly negative emotion where values and images were incongruent with personal values.

Participants made frequent use of the first persona plural when talking about their experiences. They spoke animatedly about Estonian achievements and showed a teleological understanding of Estonia as exceptional in a range of contexts, i.e. industrious, egalitarian and open (cf Beck, 2006, p.70). Many interviewees expressed positive emotion when discussing a ‘we’ or ‘us’ they did not express any negative sentiments about other nations or peoples:

”We need to introduce ourselves to make our economy more competitive”
(Mändmets, 2010, p. 71).

Yes, we did talk about this because this is the reason we were together for this project. I think that being a small country this project was important and this was mentioned sometimes but not all the time. People felt quite strong about needing to be louder about Estonia because people don’t know so much who we are and we have a big neighbour, so we need to speak with one voice about the things we are good in. We are also small in the EU and we talked a lot about the EU because we had many workgroups and co-operations with some European Union colleagues about the e-Estonia because of the presidency. They wanted us to show the ideas about the nature and the digital government more than just the business aspect. – Initial study interview #1

Moreover, they expressed similar levels of positive regard for their participation in multi-lateral frameworks as for their national identity. This finding suggested that Billig’s suggestion is unfounded, at least in this case study. In fact, the consistently positive expression of emotions regarding the materials, Estonia and Estonia’s strengths, suggested that far from being oppressive top-down impositions of identity, Nation branding materials were useful in conveying *existing* norms and ideas that were conducive to a positive national self-image and cohesive civic identity. Moreover, given that same positive sentiments were also expressed about membership of multilateral frameworks, there is little to suggest sufficient evidence that this is a solely nationalist phenomenon, rather it could exist at many different scales.

Telos & Dispensing with Negative Capital

The findings of this study show how Nation Branding practice has grown to also encompass the domestic audience, in a process identified by Dzenovcka (2004). Given the animated way in which many interviewees responded to viewing and discussing the materials, this study has shown how constructed stories and identities give a country’s people *something to believe in* in much the same way that corporate branding might promote the particular moral dimension of buying into their products:

"I enjoyed the image of the skyscraper being built. I mean here in Tallinn we don't really have any big skyscrapers like you in London but I think it is highly symbolic of our achievements as a country. Maybe this image is a metaphor. They show the image sped up and the first construction is a way of telling a story about Estonia and how our country changed after the Soviet Union." Semi-structured Interview #3

The way materials were presented as a 'story of inexorable movement toward perfection', presented in terms of an-ongoing process of reform, transition and striving (Leeman, 2012, p.15). Whilst there is no evidence that Nation Branding campaigns can play an agenda setting role, they can serve as a repository for ideas about Estonia's future direction, acting as a roadmap or wayfinder (cf Dzenovska, 2004).

Not only did materials serve as a positive view of the future but they also offered participants the chance at "collective therapy" that could dispel negative capital associated with Estonia's communist past (Dzenovska, 2005; Kaneva, 2007; Kotler *et al*, 1999; 2002; Dinnie, 2008). The corporate, lifestyle-oriented element of the nation branding materials certainly reflects the observation that "a favourable interpretation of the nation that helps boost national self-esteem" (Dzenovska, 2005, p63). This was also reflected in explicit pride that participants reported in survey responses as well as in data suggesting an increase in emotions connected to satisfaction, happiness and motivation. Moreover, several participants made reference to Estonia's achievements and how these were "showcased" or "advertised":

"I do feel a little bit inspired to watch this and to see the story altogether. You mentioned that the future is shown here not the past. I agree with you a little. But for a long time there was always a big vision and there has always been some sort of ideology hanging over our country". – Semi-structured interview #4

The banal nationalist presentation of the ordinary aspects of Estonian life certainly played a role in popularising them and adding prestige:

"Here they show Estonian achievements since independence - the way the country has modernised and so on. Looking back over the story it does make me feel pride but I wonder if they're trying to oversell our achievements. Everyday life here is not so

different from other countries really. I guess this is reality only some of the time. It looks like our Instagram life not real life.” – Semi-structured interview #4

Smallness

Estonia’s ‘smallness’ was consistently mentioned by interviewees as a reason that Estonia needs to adopt a strong and coordinated Nation Branding Strategy, even when this was not an explicit discussion topic. The need for a ‘roadmap’, strategy or plan came up frequently, suggesting that the notion of Telos seemed especially relevant to a small state, since small states must carve out niches for themselves in the international system. In this case, the materials express Estonia’s leadership on cyber norms, the digital single market and related issues.

Limitations

This study has had some limitations. Firstly, the number of participants who were willing to take part was rather low and this may make some of the data unreliable. For example, of the 300 staff who worked for EAS or were listed as having contributed who were approached, only 30 chose to give interviews. Similarly, the pool for completing the survey was shared predominantly within similar circles and was limited to circa 700 participants. This meant that neither of these two initial studies was based on a fully representative population sample. Results were dominated by residents of Tallinn or ex-Pats¹² and those in professional careers. 86% were in the age group 25-34, reflecting how the survey was circulated in a narrow pool and 100% between 18 and 45. Please note also that two survey responses were discounted because they used marketing copy taken from other Brand Estonia sources; they did not appear to be authentic responses but public-relations.

Future Research

In light of these limitations this study has opened up several avenues for future research: This study focussed on Banal flaggings of nationalism within one of Europe’s relatively homogenous states. A study aimed at understanding flaggings of identities at different scales would also offer great insight: this could include banal flaggings of

¹² Indicating those employed from abroad in Estonia in highly-qualified positions

supranationalism in different EU state's promotional material for EU institutions, especially since this study has highlighted how these were produced with different structures, or banal flaggings of nationhood for stateless nations such as Catalonia or the Basque Region in Spain, or Scotland in the UK. It could also be used as a framework to study the banal flaggings of minority ethnic groups, such as the Russian-speaking peoples in the Baltic States or Estonia's own time as a 'stateless nation' under occupation, a topic considered by Crameri (2010).

Furthermore, the topic of banal nationalist flaggings of foreign nations in highly globalised countries or cities has been mentioned by Skey (2015) but is little explored; it can only increase in relevance.

The same notion could be extended into a study of Banal Remembrance in countries where ideas about history are highly contested and 'mindlessly remembered' by opposing groups (Billig, 1995: 144). In the English-speaking world, this could include remembrance of the second world war. Moreover, many participants were drawn to the visual imagery: depictions of geography resonated most ranging from skylines to images of the natural world (Petkova, 2014). Further research into the positioning of banal geography could help better understand this. This study has shed light on how the Estonian National Branding campaign was put together and to what extent 'the state' had control of the process. Since this is crucial to understanding to what extent Nation branding materials can be interpreted as an expression of a state's projection into the world, a full comparative study of the role of the state in producing the materials would be highly valuable.

This study flagged the relevance of Nation Branding to small states as a means of power projection and role conception. This thesis also began exploring the way small state concepts and notions are operationalised in Nation branding materials; it was found that various actors in the design and implementation stages of the Nation branding materials discussed 'smallness' and that this was keenly felt as a driving factor. Since Billig was primarily interested in the Banal Nationalism of the USA, a comparative study of how small and large states use banal nationalism to reproduce tropes and construct identity (cf Billig, 1995: 6). This would be especially relevant in a post-cold war security environment where Smallness or geographical location are no longer vulnerabilities in themselves but can be advantages in a dynamic system that allows them to shape and maintain structure built on

non-military power (Browning, 2003, p13; Gigueux, 2017, p30; Simpson, 2014, p165; Dozsa, 2008, pp.94,95).

Chapter 5: Conclusions:

This thesis set out to evaluate Nation branding materials as a medium for identity construction. It found that nation branding as a medium is appropriate for maintaining but not constructing identity, since norms, tropes and ideas must resonate with their audience for them to gain traction. Citizens cannot be turned into brand ambassadors on demand. By looking at how participants contested banal nationalist ideas, it found that norms, values and tropes were contested robustly in both the production phase and the post-production phase of the nation branding materials. This contradicts assumptions in the theoretical literature about the malleability of citizens (Billig, 1995; Jansen, 2004).

This thesis considered the potential for Nation branding materials to also play to a domestic audience to construct identity. It critiqued the supposed role of citizens as co-producers of the content, shining a light on the process by which nation branding materials are put together. Both native and non-native participants were critical of ideas put forward but were offered very limited influence to make meaningful changes to content during the production process. By establishing the nature of overall control, this addressed lacunae in previous studies which have focussed on analysing the end product rather than the process.

In total, this thesis highlights the complexity and dense symbolic meanings contained in Nation branding materials and how these are determined at a high level to disseminate banal tropes, norms and ideas. This shows the relevance of Nation branding materials as a study object in political science in general and opens up the space more research into how national identity is constructed and maintained through the use of nation branding materials. As Nation Branding becomes an increasingly widespread practice, the implications for states looking to produce nation branding materials are that they have limited capacity for identity construction, only for maintaining existing identities.

This thesis set out to explore which banal nationalist tropes are most effective and found a *banal internationalism*: the most popular norms and tropes were those that appealed to niche role conceptions, such as proficiency in digital norms and participation in multi-lateral frameworks. These seemingly borderless, international tropes resonated most among participants and were *nationalised* as banal tropes. Whilst it did set out to observe how different societal groups respond to banal flaggings, there were too few participants

representative of different group to make for effective research. Nonetheless, the research highlighted how participants were critical of these materials representing only ‘one story’ that foregrounded the life led by citizens in the capital, rather than the whole country.

Nation branding materials represent a new opportunity to shore up notions of nationhood that resonate with public narratives, especially in a region where historical and cultural ideas remain contentious. As Nation Branding materials become more popular, they present great opportunities as a public diplomacy tool to shape public opinion, abroad as well as at home.

Annexes

Annex 1: Sample email to introduce my research topic.

Sample email

Dear [x],

Please allow me to introduce myself. I'm a research student at the University of Tartu's Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies.

I am conducting a research project about Estonia's '**Brand Estonia**' concept. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to conduct a brief Skype or telephone interview with you, given your position and involvement in the project as listed on the "brand.estonia.ee" website.

I am aware of your heavy workload. Nevertheless, I promise you that this interview will be short and would be of invaluable to my research. If you are available and willing to take part I would like very much to hear from you to set up a call.

I welcome any questions you might have.

Best Regards,

Richard Smith

Annex 2.1 Questions Asked in Initial Study

Questions in Scoping Interviews (Initial Study)

My initial study asked basic questions about participant involvement that included but were not limited to the following:

1. Outline your involvement with Brand Estonia as fully as possible:
2. What were your impressions of the project? What did you think about the organisation's goals? How and why did they approach you? - or did you approach them? Did they make their objectives clear? Why were they seeking your involvement?
3. Who did you perceive as being influential in the project? And who did you receive feedback from?
4. Were you involved in any brainstorming sessions about stories and key values of Brand Estonia or the 2017 Brand Campaign?
5. Do you feel Brand Estonia's most recent concept captures Estonia? - what does it miss?
6. During your engagement with Brand Estonia was Estonia's state size ever mentioned – and did this seem important to your work?
7. Did you discuss any of the following topics with your colleagues? If so, how did you talk about them?

Did you discuss Ideas about Estonia's smallness being an advantage?

1. Ideas about Estonia's history and Estonia was created
2. Ideas about security, survival and vulnerability of Estonia;
3. Ideas about institutions and groups such as the EU or the UN.

Annex 2.2 : Interview Data Collected From my Initial Study (8)

The following are transcripts of the data collected through email, phone and in-person interviews. For those participants who declined to be recorded, an anonymised copy of the note-taking sheet is attached.

Interview 1

Participant Code: kSqHZvTu

Role: Contracted Graphic Designer

Data Received: Email (after initial scoping call)

NB: Participant declined to be identified; Participant is still involved with Brand Estonia and their related projects.

1. Please outline your involvement with Brand Estonia as fully as possible:

I joined the Brand Estonia team part-way through the creation of the campaign to assist with a digital branding work-group. Mostly questions of design and reporting to senior staff about design issues and aesthetics. My overview of the process is not so good but I had to understand it enough for my job. I was responding to design concerns by the team and drafting concepts based on their wishes. I didn't do so much of the brainstorming and creating the stories because that is not my special field but I was asked to participate in one group. It was all about visuals and how the project looked on screen and in print and to the end-user. We were about seven if I remember right.

2. What were your impressions of the project? What did you think about the organisation's goals? How and why did they approach you? - or did you approach them? Did they make their objectives clear? Why were they seeking your involvement?

This was not my only job and I was not full time involved in the project. I was a contractor and they liked my portfolio work that I have for many projects. I have not really been so involved with these kind of projects before but I liked what they do and it is a really good and high-level team. Because of my role to execute their wishes I could slot in and out of the project teams.

3. Who did you perceive as being influential in the project? And who did you receive feedback from?

I received feedback some feedback on design aspects from Alari Orav, who led our project at the time. I was a contractor so did not lead so much on this project. I think this question is not so fitting for me and my role as feedback was very technical and only a little about content. I needed to understand the stories and messages for my design work but not in so much detail. Things like ideas about openness and clean lines we talked about a lot but that was the closest thing to the content. There was lots of emphasis on environment and nature – not so much on the urban environment.

4. Were you involved in any brainstorming sessions about stories and key values of Brand Estonia or the 2017 Brand Campaign?

I only took part in one workgroup but not so much. I think they are good and the team was very professional. It was very much a strategy meeting and we discussed how our design work should reflect what the marketing team. I didn't feel that they wanted us to work on their stories or marketing concepts but they definitely wanted our feedback on visuals. I had not worked on the previous campaign, like some others in my workgroup. I was the new guy it felt like. As before the environment was a big topic but most of the graphics were more connected to all of the e-Government stuff.

5. Do you feel Brand Estonia's most recent concept captures Estonia? - What does it miss?

My involvement with the stories was very limited but I know about this process for my job a lot. Mostly I was kept informed about these and they were changing very much during the project because they had many other workgroups. I attended one meeting for a digital branding workgroup with many other contractors and freelancers but we discussed how to implement messages that the team had created not creating the stories ourselves. These were the messages regarding e-estonia and digitalisation process. Alari was present at the meeting and used the input for building the messages in the toolkit. The team was certain that these messages should be most important because they are very much about Estonia but they are also no flags or usual things. That was a feedback that we received that we needed to stay on message about the internet and the environment but we could not use flags – only the colours but this had to be subtle.

The team worked professionally and generally the result is good and usable. It is also already being used in several instances. However, the launch communication was not well thought out and that resulted in a rather negative reception from the general audience. From the technical side, the colours they have chosen, are often incompatible with video projectors, when used with text (in some instances, the text will not be readable, due to low contrast in projected image). That does not diminish the need and practical application of the toolbox, which in general are very well made but this was my major criticism.

6. During your engagement with Brand Estonia was Estonia's size ever mentioned? Did this seem important to your work? Did you discuss any of the following topics with your colleagues? If so, how did you talk about them?

Yes, we did talk about this because this is the reason we were together for this project. I think that being a small country this project was important and this was mentioned sometimes but not all the time. People felt quite strong about needing to be louder about Estonia because people don't know so much who we are and we have a big neighbour, so we need to speak with one voice about the things we are good in. We are also small in the EU and we talked a lot about the EU because we had many workgroups and co-operations with some European Union colleagues about the e-Estonia because of the presidency. They wanted us to show the ideas about the nature and the digital government more than just the business aspect.

Did you discuss Ideas about Estonia's smallness being an advantage?

We were lots of contractors and lots of entrepreneurs who worked on our workgroup. There were lots of very great people and with the colleagues we talked a lot about the “country as a service”. I guess that this was what a lot of people like me think about Estonia. The team was very start-up mind-set because of where we came from. We are all very international Estonian guys – one or two foreign too. Lots of freelancers and contractors to get the most ideas.

Ideas about Estonia’s history and Estonia was created

I think they were trying not to talk about this so much. In the materials they didn’t even want Estonian flags. All the stories are about Estonia but it could be somewhere else and it could be anyone. We talked about the e-residency and the campaigns that were created for this and how they were about countries with no borders or a country as a service. This helped us with fine-tuning of the design stage. I really like the video with the skating that we use for the website because it gave the impression of no borders and that was important. I think this was the heart of what were were doing but from technical perspective this does not work so well.

Ideas about security, survival and vulnerability of Estonia;

[Did not discuss]

Ideas about institutions and groups

The EU was mentioned because we were working with working groups on the e-Estonia concepts and they wanted to share some materials with the Estonian team in the EU, so that was important but the concept is very universal and showing geography wasn’t so important.

Interview 2

Participant Code: 8Xj9mJNu

Role: Marketing Office (participated in stakeholder working-group for 2017 Brand Estonia toolbox)

Data Received: Email (after initial scoping call)

NB: Participant declined to be identified; Participant is still involved with EAS

1. Please outline your involvement with Brand Estonia as fully as possible:

I was working with EDM team and with EAS, and they invited us to participate in working groups. I was approached because Research in Estonia was part of Estonian brand also before (welcome to Estonia brand conception). They wanted us to be part of a working group for Research and marketing Estonia as a conference destination. EDM was a Estonian Design Team (EDM) who was specially formed to create the new Estonian brand. In my own organisation I reported all the things to my colleague and to my department and executive director. As a representative of Estonian Research Council and marketing specialist of Research in Estonia, my part was to give information about Estonian research and science - what are we good at? It was very interesting that they do not create logo, more a toolbox that can be used by different partners [sic] (entrepreneurs, higher education representatives, tourism, etc.).

2. What were your impressions of the project? What did you think about the organisation's goals? How and why did they approach you? - or did you approach them? Did they make their objectives clear? Why were they seeking your involvement?

That they do not create logo, more a toolbox that can be used by different partners (entrepreneurs, higher education representatives, tourism, etc.). I liked the idea of the toolbox and evolving brand and values we talked about - example that we do not over-hype only Estonia, but we also say how things are, example our weather but on the whole I think it is very positive – sometimes not so truthful even.

3. Who did you perceive as being influential in the project? And who did you receive feedback from? [Question not so applicable:]

Our contact was a project coordinator for our workgroup but we didn't do any work for them. We wanted to use their toolbox.

4. Were you involved in any brainstorming sessions about stories and key values of Brand Estonia or the 2017 Brand Campaign?

EDM team made a first draft. Yes, the main concept was introduced and we could argue if we agreed or not, some things or mostly wordings were changed in brainstorming sessions. They had marketing guys create all the main stories. In my job I do marketing but didn't write the Brand Estonia stories. Estonia story is full of different approaches and fields, like economy, education, tourism etc. Representatives from each field were invited together and every representative said what and how should be talked about their field - what is important, what is good, what is not so good and we could share our own expectations to the tool - example we want this and that kind of PowerPoint slide templates or that if someone from business sector goes to other country to find new cooperation partners and they need to introduce also Estonian science, then we are the persons who can give them information, or that in the toolbox there would be already let's say a short introduction to our science that can be easily modified and used in other presentations etc.

Do you have any opinions on the stories and values that were chosen by Brand Estonia?

I think it is important to have key messages and facts - example how long does it take in Estonia to register a company - because some say three minutes, some say 13 minutes and some say 30 minutes. And also about the values - I think it is important to say values that are true, not what we want to be true. Like the environment – this is very important to me and we have lots of carbon emissions but they say that our nature is so pure. I didn't like this so much.

5. Do you feel Brand Estonia's most recent concept captures Estonia? - what does it miss

For me it is a bit early to say as it is still a process on the very early stage. And we have first keys and tools to use, but we haven't seen the feedback and outcome yet, too early to measure. But I truly think and hope that if we take it seriously, this toolbox will be a very good "window"/"tool" for all of us in any business to get people to know Estonia. I think if we use the tool box seriously, then it will work and project a strong message to the people.

6. During your engagement with Brand Estonia was Estonia's size ever mentioned? Did this seem important to your work? Did you discuss any of the following topics with your colleagues? If so, how did you talk about them?

Yes, we did talk about this because this is the reason we were together for this project. I think that being a small country this project was important and this was mentioned sometimes but not all the time. People felt quite strong about needing to be louder about Estonia because people don't know so much who we are and we have a big neighbour, so we need to speak with one voice about the things we are good in. We are also small in the EU and we talked a lot about the EU because we had many workgroups and co-operations with some European Union colleagues about the e-Estonia because of the presidency. They wanted us to show the ideas about the nature and the digital government more than just the business aspect.

Did you discuss Ideas about Estonia's smallness being an advantage?

It was discussed and I think behind the story of us is the fact that we are small country - it has its own success story in it and that is something we definitely talked about. That was why we were doing this and why they invited us there. America does not need to do this but we do. As for the other questions I think they are more for security and political people who organised the project.

[The participant did not feel able to answer the questions about the various notions of small state identity. We arranged a phone call, during which the participant did not feel able to comment directly. Instead they stressed that from their perspective, they were trying to use the Brand Estonia toolbox to gain greater recognition and build up partnerships with other European Science and Research Institutes. He felt unable to comment on the five topics that I proposed].

Interview 3

Participant: EDtg4F9y

Participant Code: EDtg4F9y

Role: Contracted as

Data Received: Email (after initial scoping call)

NB: Participant declined to be identified; Participant is still involved with Brand Estonia and their related projects.

1. Please outline your involvement with Brand Estonia as fully as possible:

I was one of the stakeholders invited to a brainstorming session in which values for the latest Brand Estonia concept were discussed. I was not involved in producing the design materials because that is not so my job but they said they wanted an 'expert' to shape the project.

2. What were your impressions of the project? What did you think about the organisation's goals? How and why did they approach you? - or did you approach them? Did they make their objectives clear? Why were they seeking your involvement?

We were just invited and for me the process was quite chaotic because we didn't get feedback. If I organise something like this for my job I would give more feedback to the people and to ask them why they are there and what they are doing - and afterwards to show how that was useful and what was decided. Yes, very chaotic and I didn't feel the connection to what they were doing. There was no end point and no discussion they just wanted to test our reactions but they didn't make it very clear what we should do. I don't know what they decided on what stories and such things they used. I don't have such a good picture of this.

3. Who did you perceive as being influential in the project? And who did you receive feedback from?

Like I say it was very chaotic and I didn't get feedback – probably because I was just there for the group meeting they called. They made it seem so important but they had their own idea and they didn't want us to change it.

4. Were you involved in any brainstorming sessions about stories and key values of Brand Estonia or the 2017 Brand Campaign?

No.

5. Do you feel Brand Estonia's most recent concept captures Estonia? - what does it miss?

It was important to be visible. If we are not part of it - it would be harder to be visible. If we are not part of the image, then we are not part of the wider picture and that is better than nothing. I work in research promotion and this architecture is very useful to us because it shows the whole life in Estonia: not just study in Estonia because this or work in Estonia because of this - it was a good toolbox for us to attach our work onto. We don't have the resources to go alone and so I suppose it might be worth it.

6. During your engagement with Brand Estonia was Estonia's size ever mentioned? Did this seem important to your work? Did you discuss any of the following topics with your colleagues? If so, how did you talk about them?

Being small, you have to be smart and think strategically Resources are limited and promotion is expensive - it's more than just Facebook - I know this from my work that it takes lots of time and resources to market something properly. Especially for research where we don't have the same funding as Germany or America. That's why we were there because we just don't have the time and people to do all this things for ourselves. We discussed lots of topics. It was a long time ago, so I don't quite remember but they had some things from their marketing people and we talked about life in Estonia but I think they already had their ideas.

Did you discuss Ideas about Estonia's smallness being an advantage?

We used this tool box on our own initiative because we wanted to have a single voice and to attach ourselves onto the brand and we thought it was good. That was important for us in our role in securing Estonia as a tourist destination for conferences. We are a small country and we need to have a unified strategy or voice.

[The participant did not recall the specific details of the topics discussed other than their research partnership with the EU. She added that: "The EU is where we do all our big projects and we work with lots of partners. You spoke to my colleague about this I think when you called. We did not speak about these things in the group."]

Interview 4

Participant Code: VyrRVR2W

Role: Academic (joined a working group on the Brand Estonia tool box)

Data Received: Transcript of Phone Conversation after initial email exchange

NB: Participant declined to be identified; Participant was not directly involved in Brand Estonia Campaigns; Was surprised to be contacted.

1. Please outline your involvement with Brand Estonia as fully as possible:

It was a pragmatic decision. We decided to go along with the Brand Estonia project because we were involved in conference promotion - and they offered the toolbox as well as the right connections to get things moving. We were encouraged to pick up the same themes as they did and this wasn't such a big problem. We used their services because there were financial benefits for conference funding rounds - and it was also just convenient. - And I think it's important for a small country to promote it [Estonia] and to help things along. We were not involved in the content creation but they helped us to use it and they helped us with tenders and winning contracts but also with things like logo branding and those sorts of things. That was quite helpful for us.

2. What were your impressions of the project? What did you think about the organisation's goals? How and why did they approach you? - or did you approach them? Did they make their objectives clear? Why were they seeking your involvement?

[Not applicable as participant not affiliated formally with project].

3. Who did you perceive as being influential in the project? And who did you receive feedback from?

It was important to speak with one voice - to use the image that those guys had built up and to go with that - that was very important to us. It was very convenient in that sense. We were just going along with it and they were happy to support us. When I say us I mean me and my assistant here [name undisclosed; also interviewed]. They also had good links to other organisations like the Estonian Conference Bureau or whatever it is called and that really helped us to draw attention to what we were doing.

4. Were you involved in any brainstorming sessions about stories and key values of Brand Estonia or the 2017 Brand Campaign?

No. We participated on a working group about how to use the Brand that they had created. By way of background, I would simply say that while I don't know formally why I have been included on this Brand Estonia list, I suspect that it was merely because I was the project leader for a grant that we got from Enterprise Estonia to co-finance the holding of a conference. In this respect, I have had no role in developing Estonia's brand, except to the extent that we had to include certain tourist events into our academic program as part of the grant. This was done, to be sure, with a view to showcasing Estonia alongside our academic activities, and we were happy to do it. But we have not a part of a more concerted effort to promote Estonia, also because we currently do not plan on organizing any similarly large (300+ participant) event any time in the near future.

5. Do you feel Brand Estonia's most recent concept captures Estonia? - what does it miss?

We liked what they were doing and like I say there were benefits for us to be involved. That was the main focus for us. But I like how they showcased Estonia's tangible IT achievements - e-voting etc and that's important. There is a real need to stay ahead of the pack and to draw attention to Estonia, to be willing and ready to talk about it [Estonia] and to really talk it up. Small states have to work on what makes them stand out - and the usual national costumes just won't do it. From our perspective we were trying to compete to make Estonia a key conference destination and so we wanted to piggy-back on the dynamic nation reputation that emanated from this IT narrative.

[Q6a. Interjection:] Was there anything in particular that stood out for you? - Any stories that you thought really represented Estonia - or was something missing perhaps?

The stories they present are all quite general. Yeah - environment, IT stuff, nature and WiFi and some of us didn't really connect with those things so much. There was one image in the campaign - and that's the girl on the hay bail with the laptop. We liked that one because it captured a mix of the two features: Estonia as a great place to work and also as a place with good nature. That was crucial to us for branding Estonia as key conference destination.

6. During your engagement with Brand Estonia was Estonia's size ever mentioned? Did this seem important to your work? Did you discuss any of the following topics with your colleagues? If so, how did you talk about them?

That was definitely a motivation and we felt that was essential. We had access to some benefits for working with them and that was a big pull. We felt that we were there because we wanted to support the guys like I say - and the national costumes aren't enough. We need to talk up Estonia and get the word out.

Did you discuss Ideas about Estonia's smallness being an advantage?

The opposite, we felt that this was something that we needed to do to draw attention to what we were doing. We were piggy-backing on the Brand Estonia tool box because we felt we needed to compete and stay relevant - I suppose this is more related to your other point [survival]. But we did not discuss so many of these with the Brand Estonia people but that is why we felt their work was useful. We don't have the capacity to go it alone.

[The participant did feel able to offer further comment on the final questions related to the theoretical map].

Interview 5

Participant Code: wmuNHVci

Role: Editor and Typesetter

Data Received: Phone Interview (after initial scoping call)

NB: Participant declined to be identified; Participant is no longer connected to Brand Estonia or its related projects or partner agencies.

1. Please outline your involvement with Brand Estonia as fully as possible:

I was responsible for creating the typeface. I was working with a team of three persons (4 including me), doing my best to translate Art Director's vision into palpable material for the Toolbox.

2. What were your impressions of the project? What did you think about the organisation's goals? How and why did they approach you? - or did you approach them? Did they make their objectives clear? Why were they seeking your involvement?

There was rapid development. Few months of touching the ground, few meetings and schedule drafting. And then 4 months of typeface development. It was all very full on, especially because I was involved in other commercial projects but the work was enjoyable and I felt I should help raise the profile. I think it could be very successful, so I wanted it to be part of my profile.

3. Who did you perceive as being influential in the project? And who did you receive feedback from?

For my part mostly the Art Director [Name withheld] supplied my briefs and offered me feedback. We were definitely separate from the other marketing people. I came up with wide and no-nonsense sans serif for the "work" part and stenciled version for the "technology-nature-air" field. They were not so much a complicated client and they had a clear idea of their brief and what they wanted. It was all about being clean and modern. I remember thinking that there were no flags or even the design team did not really use any patterns – those ones that are popular. The closest thing was the blue black and white colour scheme but that is not so obvious.

4. Were you involved in any brainstorming sessions about stories and key values of Brand Estonia or the 2017 Brand Campaign?

Not so much. Like I say, they had a reasonably clear idea that stayed constant. It evolved over the course of the project. First it was about nature and work-oriented Estonian mind-set and the online services. We did not see too much about the stories but we had to know them and see what our typeface would be representing. Whilst I was working on the project, technology advancements came into focus, plus nature, clean air, lots of air in fact. Those were the two main things they were pushing. I didn't feel there was much change. It was very constant, what they wanted. Me and my team just supplied the building blocks and we were presenting their message as clearly as we could.

5. Do you feel Brand Estonia's most recent concept captures Estonia? - what does it miss?

I did not even take so much interest in the project if I am honest because for me it was just another project in my portfolio. I was working on many things at the time and I did this a bit like as a hobby because I think it is important to create a stronger message.

6. During your engagement with Brand Estonia was Estonia's size ever mentioned? Did this seem important to your work? Did you discuss any of the following topics with your colleagues? If so, how did you talk about them?

For my team it was very much about the business side of things and selling Estonia as the country as a service and as a competitive place to work, live and do business. A lot of the people were the technology people and they wanted to make a big impression as the small country but we are punching above our weight all the time. This was the dominant thing for them. The coordinators wanted to bring out the environment and the e-government. It was interesting to bring the two together.

Did you discuss Ideas about Estonia's smallness being an advantage?

Yes and no. I think this was why we needed to do this but in general I just think that Estonians are competitive but because of my involvement I just didn't take part in these stakeholder groups of the strategy groups that the leadership team would lead.

Ideas about Estonia's history and Estonia was created

Like before, the concept is all about being new and very clean, so there are no flags. I don't have such a good insight to be honest. The other concepts we discussed are not so relevant to my work and I feel like they were thought about by the marketing team and their bosses. Lots of the people were contractors and there were only a few people really leading and directing the project.

[The participant did not feel the remaining categories were relevant.]

Interview 6

a

Interview 7

Participant: Nzb6EUR6

Role: Formerly involved with EAS and Ministry of Economy; Strategic Communications officer

Received: Phone Interview after initial email exchange

NB Participant declined to be identified.

1. Please outline your involvement with Brand Estonia as fully as possible:

I was a coordinator for lots of different projects, including the 100th Estonian anniversary project and I have worked with EAS before on their last branding campaign earlier in my career pathway. I was contacted by the EAS team because they thought I might see things from two sides. Some of the projects – or desktops we call them – I was managing were things where we could apply the Brand Estonia toolbox but I also knew it from inside, so they wanted me to work with them. In my previous role I had worked a long time with the ministry of the economy in communications and they invited me to their focus group or working group, so I was familiar with this sort of strategic communications.

I've worked in this field a long time - in Estonia and abroad - and I think they wanted someone to act as a sounding board for their ideas. They knew that I knew some people from their previous brand concepts. I had previously worked on the Positively Transforming campaign and they wanted someone who had experience, so I suppose they wanted someone who had been involved before. How to explain it to you? My role was to keep the relevant people around the table and to bring the right stakeholders to the table because they knew I knew some EU people from the 'Positively Transforming' campaign. In the project I was more senior than last time but I did spend so much time on it. I was managing several 'desktops'. The main one was Estonia's EU presidency that was coming up.

[1a. Interjection:] Who were the relevant people – and were they personal connections of yours?

They were lots of different people – people who had helped last time – they wanted the people who were doing good things in their field – especially the journalists and media people. I mostly had contacts who were connected with the EU or in government.

[1b. Interjection:] Did you hold any working groups with random samples of citizens – or did your work mostly focus on industry and trade professionals?

From my part we almost exclusively looked at industry people – I am sure we have had some of those groups with ordinary people – but not so much. It was about showcasing all of our strengths and where we were leading – this was the main focus.

2. What were your impressions of the project? What did you think about the organisation's goals? How and why did they approach you? - or did you approach them? Did they make their objectives clear? Why were they seeking your involvement?

I consulted with the Brand Estonia team from EAS leading up to publication of the 2017 concept in assembling their key stories, so I would lead some of their stakeholder groups and help them refine the key themes that you sent me [refers to key brand stories listed on brand.estonia.ee] – but this time I was less involved time-wise to be honest - And I think it is also important that these stories are not fixed – even though they were working to the 2017 launch – they will still change and edit all of these things. It is in this way very dynamic.

[2a. Interjection:] Speaking to previous participants, several have mentioned the fact that they felt the team had already decided on the stories they were going to use and that their input was not so valued – did you feel like the team were open to negotiation about the final product – or did they already have this in mind?

We had many discussion about the **values space** that they were looking to create and they had some quite clear ideas about some motifs they would use to write the stories, so I didn't change it too much. For them, the most important themes were the environment and the promotion of the e-Estonia idea. On the whole, the stakeholders in the focus groups were positive – and we did hold many of these groups. Some were more successful than others because many people simply didn't really know what they were doing there – or they had never taken part in a focus group before. They didn't know what to say.

3. Who did you perceive as being influential in the project? And who did you receive feedback from?

I had worked with the director at the time [Alari Olaf] and we have worked together previously but my role with the latest concept was not so great – I have other commitments and I cannot give so much my time to this. I would say that there were only a few coordinators – but lots of stakeholders that they brought in – there were many of the part time staff and very few there permanently.

4. Were you involved in any brainstorming sessions about stories and key values of Brand Estonia or the 2017 Brand Campaign?

Well like I say, I would lead some of the workgroups because I had some experience of participating before. We did have on workgroup where there was disagreement. Previously we have used **the ‘cross roads’ idea** where we discuss how Estonia has some eastern elements and some western elements but many people did not like this leading up to the EU presidency.

[4a. Interjection:] What did they say about this?

We were all busy because of the upcoming EU presidency – and they did not want to bring up our Eastern connection. We knew that this time, more people would be watching what we were doing and we didn’t want to bring up this whole East meets West so much. I think it is old and - as you can see, the recent brand does not include very much that is *Estonian* [*her emphasis*] because it didn’t fit with the other messages. It was all about the online international Estonia – I had this impression - was open to anyone – you can do the e-residency and have your business here. That is the big story and its what everyone was going to look out for.

5. Do you feel Brand Estonia’s most recent concept captures Estonia? - what does it miss?

Like I say, there was some disagreement but that is normal. It was also like that in the last project on which I worked. It is normal because you cannot tell everyone’s story. We would spend lots of time discussing which to choose – and everyone had lots of suggestions. It was similar situation last time. You have to pick and we had discussed before that there were some ideas in the team that we would choose. We are showing our achievements as a country, so we picked the recent things like the e-Government things that my colleague is leading on now.

6. During your engagement with Brand Estonia was Estonia’s size ever mentioned? Did this seem important to your work? Did you discuss any of the following topics with your colleagues? If so, how did you talk about them?

[The participant broke from the script as arranged by email to talk about which themes she felt were most important:]

I read this list of topics that you sent me and I think that some of them were definitely important but it is hard to say that they were discussed so clearly. Being small is very important and I think this is why Estonian's did these projects in the first place. We have to catch up and it's very hard when nobody knows you. We don't want to be forgotten about, so we have to be very clear – and to speak with one voice about the things that are important to Estonians...

Working on the 2017 [Brand] Concept, was similar to the previous. We are branding something that does not exist. We are not looking for the past and for our roots so much this time – although I know what you mean because we focussed very much upon nature – even the boulders [she refers to an object depicted on Estonia.ee], to show that Estonia is old but also the e-Government to show that Estonia is new. It is strange because it is all about the past and future but we do not focus so much about now. It is like a country that always was existing and always be existing – that is somehow the message that I feel...

[6a. Interjection:] But did you talk about these things – or is this just your impression?

Being a small country we talked about a lot. We did not talk much about why – but it is obvious – we are a small country and we need to create a clear message and I think that the people who came together to make the campaign know this too, you know?

[6b. Interjection:] Why do you think that they know it? What gives you this impression?

I think because that is what we do when we are marketing or selling. Nobody knows so much about Estonia like America, so we need to sell our message and make sure that people know about us and our country.

Interview 8

Participant: Nzb6EUR6

Role: Former CEO of British Estonian Chamber of Commerce; consulted as a stakeholder; Also user of Brand Estonia toolbox.

Received: Interview In-person

NB Participant declined to be identified.

1. Please outline your involvement with Brand Estonia as fully as possible:

I was contacted by the team working on Brand Estonia last year [2016] because I was identified as a person of interest to them because I am working with the organisations that have a connection to abroad with my work for the British Estonian Chamber of Commerce. I participated in two focus groups and I received some resources from EAS regarding their tool kit which we used at BECC to help brand our trade mission this year, so I have used this from both sides as the user of the tool kit that they produced and I was consulting with them in one of their stakeholder groups that they held through late 2016 leading up to the launch.

2. What were your impressions of the project? What did you think about the organisation's goals? How and why did they approach you? - or did you approach them? Did they make their objectives clear? Why were they seeking your involvement?

Sometimes I think that they are selling Estonia for more than it is and I do not believe so much what they are trying to sell. Even though, in a way it is what we also try to do at BECC, we brand the relationship to the two countries and we sell it to our members and to the public who come to our events. I support very much those people like Piret and Alari at EAS who do the work and promote Estonia but sometimes I don't quite believe it all – even if I appreciate what they are trying to do.

3. Who did you perceive as being influential in the project? [n/a: And who did you receive feedback from?]

This is hard to tell because I only reach out with those representatives of the focus groups – but I did have some contact with Alari and Piret who gave us some materials leading up to the launch, so I suppose it was very much led by the directors and the ideas that they had – they definitely had a very clear idea of the content which they presented to us in the small groups.

4. Were you involved in any brainstorming sessions about stories and key values of Brand Estonia or the 2017 Brand Campaign?

In the two workgroups – we were representatives of the chambers of commerce – they had arranged working groups to present the project for 2017 with some business people – it was a smallish group of around. Some of the people in the group had even been involved in the previous campaign but I do not remember it so well. It seemed to be reasonably well organised and they wanted our feedback about what they showed us. We spoke as a group about the materials for both the tool box [brand.estonia.ee] and the concept [Estonia.ee] and how they might be used.

[4a. Interjection:] What did you discuss in the groups?

People were largely enthusiastic about how it looked because they found it very professional and we have tried marketing ourselves but we just don't have such good resources to do that kind of campaign. I think because it was mostly business people, we talked mostly about the e-government and the internet services that they were advertising and less about the other parts of the concept, like the clean air or the beautiful nature. They are all very important for Estonia but in Saaremaa maybe - not in Tallinn, where the air is not so clean. The group was in English because the business people from the companies and groups were not speaking Estonian.

5. Do you feel Brand Estonia's most recent concept captures Estonia? - what does it miss?

I think it captures some of Estonia – or the future of Estonia but I worry we are overselling ourselves in this campaign. Maybe people find out that things aren't so good and they will be disappointed.

6. During your engagement with Brand Estonia was Estonia's size ever mentioned? Did this seem important to your work? Did you discuss any of the following topics with your colleagues? If so, how did you talk about them?

[broke from script to talk about which themes she felt were most important:]

I think there is something in this because it was somehow assumed that we are here because of this and that If we don't do this then we will fall behind and people will forget this. Lots of

people there – they are mostly the business people – wanted very much to tell more about Estonia. There one of our board members who very much wants to promote Estonia as a the hub to do business, the Delaware of Europe but this is a big dream.

They definitely got more of the marketing people to work on the campaign – and that's why it looks so good – but it is hard to say that what they created is so Estonian but maybe that is what they are going for. The people in my workgroup were very international and they were not so the audience for the traditional costumes and the traditional historical things that you see here in the main square. For them, Tallinn as their little port city where they can run their businesses from with good government and good taxes but they are not so much aware of the history as maybe they should be. This is a big challenge, I think.

For them Tallinn is the new Hong Kong – or cheap Sweden or something like this – I don't believe it so much but I know what they are going for and it is good that they are trying. They are selling the relationship to the place to people to come here and to make a life – and hopefully to bring their business – and that's just what we do with our efforts at BECC to be honest, we push to sell the relationship between Britain and Estonia, we work with the embassy to make the materials, and we will use this tool kit for our aims, even If I don't fully agree with it all.

[6a. Interjection:] Did things like this ever come up when you were in the meetings?

I don't remember so much to be honest. That's the problem that it was a little while ago and I was not paying so much of attention on those days we joined the focus group. I think that the foreigners there, from our organisation and from other places were very captivated by the very Scandinavian, Nordic look of the whole thing and they have the same vision about Estonia as the great trading place for entrepreneurs. Especially the people from the USA, who for them this is a very small country – they very much saw Tallinn as the great place for the Holding Company and they can move here and use it strategically.

So maybe Estonia is strategically small- like the little Delaware or Luxembourg - but not so much for Estonians. I don't want to say it's not true, what they say, but also – it is not perfectly true. It's all about them getting the companies to move here and selling them something – I am cynical in this regard.

That's the problem I had was that it is all very clean lines and nice pictures and this did not match my childhood experience of growing up here. It is all like this with the nice nature and

the fashionable apartments – you know all those videos they have – but this is only one aspect of life here in Tallinn and its mostly for our members, the fashionable ex pat life.

[6b. Interjection:] Were you able to bring this up in the discussions – did other people share your views on this issue?

No, I think that this was one of the problems – that I was one of the few who spoke Estonian there – and I have lived here all my life – but that what they were showing – I still don't know how to say it – it was as if they have pictured all the good things at once and pretend they happen all the time. Estonia is not California, you know? And also for young people – the campaign is for younger people who are doing professional jobs, so it shows the nice things and this I do not like so much.

[Interjection: 7.] But you still used the tool box, so you didn't mind them?

Yes, this is the thing because we don't really have so much resources as such a small organisation –maybe it is more because we are a small organisation and not because we are a small country. Yes, I think that we did not have so much choice because otherwise it is me and my laptop with Photoshop – or I must ask one of the board members who is good with these things to do it.

Also I should tell that I understand why they are doing this and I think like other people I felt like we should get on board with the concept because it has been so good at getting Estonia more visible in the more recent years, maybe if this works, then we can attract more people here and it will be good for our membership, so I think it's good for business mostly but no so much else.

[Interjection: 8.:] And how did you use the tools presented to you on the brand.estonia.ee website?

We copied the style mostly – and we used the writing guide – because I guess we are branding a trading relationship, you could say, so it is a little different. We went ahead with the business – especially for the fintech side of things – because we know we have two audiences and they both like this. The nature not so much [looks at printed materials] because this isn't such a big thing for our members I don't think.

We share a lot of the materials, like slide decks and things like that – for us more about the visuals – rather than using the stories. We naturally do a lot with story 3 [Digital Society] and

we will send some of the slide decks to our partners or new members if they are moving to Estonia or opening up some operations here.

On the website, they say all these facts about how you can file your taxes in three minutes and that this is the most entrepreneurship country in Europe and things like this – again this is half true. You can do this if you are familiar with the system but it's not always so perfectly true. When we have new members and they move here I find myself helping them with all this stuff, so I see the times that it doesn't work so much. This can be frustrating.

Annex 3: Interview Data From Main Study:

I took notes around the following Questions for sources in the Main Study. As these interviews took place face to face, these were not recorded word for word, with the exception of key quotations. In total, 18 satisfactory interviews took place of the planned 30.

Unstructured:

- How do you feel after watching these materials?
- Do they represent any domestic issues?
- How would you respond to the statement that “In Estonia, clean and untouched nature co-exists with the world’s most digitally advanced society. It is a place for independent minds where bright ideas meet a can-do spirit.”?
- We are a people connected by a common purpose
- In 20 years, Estonia will be a better place
- I see a future here for myself
- Estonia is developing fast
- The vision presented here is authentic
- The vision presented here is truthful
- The vision presented here is accurate

Semi-structured:

- Do you feel that they present an accurate picture of Estonia?
- How accurate is the “Independent minds” value?
- How accurate is the “Clean environment”?
- How accurate is the “Digital society”?

Key quotations from discussion:

"It very much starts with just the landscape I'm showing the girl in the forests the trees in the lakes all of the places that are familiar to citizens I am you remind me very much of my childhood and yeah I mean it really doesn't repeat anything amazing it just to pick the everyday life of a Estonian." - Semi-structured Interview #1

"There is one thing that shows a man putting on slippers. This is quite unique to the Slavic countries and I think that many of the citizens can relate to this. This is very simple. They show people making tea, going to work, making food, and spending time with friends and family. They also show working people and daily life, the byt [Russian: daily life] there are lots of technology. They trying to show achievements and strengths in the world." - Semi-structured Interview #2

"I do feel a little bit inspired to watch this and to see the story altogether. You mentioned that the future is shown here not the past. I agree with you a little. But for a long time there was always a big vision and there has always been some sort of ideology hanging over our country." - Semi-structured Interview #2

"I enjoyed the image of the skyscraper being built. I mean here in Tallinn we don't really have any big skyscrapers like you in London but I think it is highly symbolic of our achievements as a country. Maybe this image is a metaphor. By that I mean the way they show the image sped up and the first construction is a way of telling a story about Estonia and how our country underwent a successful transition. I think this is what they are trying to say - and they are telling the truth here." Semi-structured Interview #3

"This is just the everyday life - or the best part of it. There is no flag in this campaign as we talked about but I think it is significant that the images in the campaign I'll have a filter. As if the blue black and white colours of the flagAre still there and even though they show universal images of daily life that could be any other country they are given a Estonian flavour."-Semi-structured Interview" #5

"I can't say that it is fully authentic fully truthful or fully accurate but I think that is the purpose. Many of things here areHalf-truths. Sometimes I feel like these messages are like propaganda. They want to tellers that everything is getting better all the time. I feel like they want to tell us that everything is great. I guess we have done a better job than Latvia for keeping our people." -Semi-structured Interview #7"

"To me this is all very cultureless. There is nothing Estonian about this at all" - Interview #11

Annex 4:

Annex 4: Results of Survey Data. Survey closed at 709 responses. Average scores rounded to 2 decimal places:

Adjectives	Before (Native)	After (Native)	% Change	Before (Non-Native)	After (Non-Native)	% Change
1-6 scale						
Rested (+)	3.91	3.82	2.30%	3.83	3.65	4.70%
Restless (-)	2.65	2.57	3.02%	2.89	2.97	-2.77%
Content (+)	4.13	3.88	6.05%	3.94	3.74	5.08%
Bad (-)	1.54	1.43	7.14%	2.21	2.34	-5.88%
Worn out (-)	3.63	2.97	18.18%	3.01	2.54	15.61%
Composed (+)	4.01	4.55	-13.47%	4.12	4.67	-13.35%
Tired (-)	3.17	2.97	6.31%	3.37	2.85	15.43%
Great (+)	3.64	3.58	1.65%	3.46	3.04	12.14%
Energetic (+)	3.19	3.54	-10.97%	3.01	3.24	-7.64%
Uneasy (-)	2.62	2.56	2.29%	2.17	1.84	15.21%
Uncomfortable (-)	2.41	2.47	-2.49%	2.31	2.87	-24.24%
Alert (+)	3.72	3.82	-2.69%	3.19	4.39	-37.62%
Calm (+)	3.72	3.54	4.84%	3.22	3.07	4.66%
Superb (+)	3.09	3.14	-1.62%	3.14	2.96	5.73%
Sleepy (-)	3.16	2.71	14.24%	3.51	2.28	35.04%
Good (+)	4.49	4.39	2.23%	3.88	3.34	13.92%
At-ease (+)	3.92	3.85	1.79%	3.89	3.01	22.62%
Unhappy (-)	2.36	2.01	14.83%	2.01	1.54	23.38%
Discontent (-)	3.63	3.67	-1.10%	3.12	2.95	5.45%
Highly Motivated (+)	3.28	3.17	3.35%	3.13	3.99	-27.48%
Tense (-)	2.37	2.12	10.55%	2.43	2.34	3.70%
Fresh (+)	4.33	4.13	4.62%	3.84	4.28	-11.46%
Happy (+)	2.05	2.24	-9.27%	2.36	2.53	-7.20%
Nervous (-)	3.35	3.12	6.87%	3.17	2.77	12.62%
Exhausted (-)	2.98	2.14	28.19%	2.83	2.14	24.38%
Calm (+)	2.93	2.71	7.51%	2.26	2.87	-26.99%
Wide-awake (+)	3.64	3.41	6.32%	3.43	3.91	-13.99%
Wonderful (+)	3.16	3.44	-8.86%	3.35	3.81	-13.73%
Relaxed (+)	2.93	2.69	8.19%	2.83	3.13	-10.60%
Bad (-)	2.35	2.13	9.36%	2.21	2.09	5.43%

Testing Key Messaging: Character						
Key Messages 1-6 scale	Before (Native)	After (Native)	% Change	Before (Non-Native)	After (Non-Native)	% Change
Nordic	4.52	4.98	10.18%	3.31	4.21	27.19%
Pragmatic	4.25	4.69	10.35%	3.17	4.22	33.12%
Honest	3.78	3.93	3.97%	3.36	3.09	-8.04%
Straightforward	4.75	4.84	1.89%	3.62	3.56	-1.66%
Egalitarian	4.32	4.44	2.78%	3.19	3.64	14.11%
Close to nature	4.51	4.46	-1.11%	4.05	4.14	2.22%
Surprising	3.98	4.41	10.80%	4.64	4.63	-0.22%
Different	3.17	3.97	25.24%	3.16	3.79	19.94%
Individualistic	3.36	3.01	-10.42%	3.24	3.67	13.27%
Contrasting	3.62	3.56	-1.66%	3.02	3.26	7.95%
Brave	3.19	3.54	10.97%	3.78	3.93	3.97%
Smart	4.05	4.14	2.22%	4.75	5.31	11.79%
Innovative	4.64	4.63	-0.22%	4.52	4.98	10.18%
Tech-savvy	3.16	3.44	8.86%	4.25	4.69	10.35%
Curious	3.24	3.21	-0.93%	3.78	3.93	3.97%
Discontented	3.02	3.26	7.95%	4.75	4.84	1.89%

Testing Key Messaging: Character						
Key Messages 1-6 scale	Before (Native)	After (Native)	% Change	Before (Non-Native)	After (Non-Native)	% Change
Independent minds	4.32	4.42	2.31%	3.78	3.73	-1.32%
Our society is not hierarchical	4.51	4.63	2.66%	4.52	4.98	10.18%
Everyone can live up to their potential	3.98	4.27	7.29%	4.25	4.69	10.35%
Our society is not hierarchical	3.17	3.21	1.26%	3.78	3.93	3.97%
Easy and straightforward communication with the state	4.05	3.89	-3.95%	4.75	4.84	1.89%
Clean environment	4.74	4.69	-1.05%	3.24	3.67	13.27%
Estonia has a lot of untouched nature and a low population density. This is very rare in today's world. We know how to care for our environment and we are proud of it.	5.32	5.38	1.13%	3.02	3.22	6.62%
We hold fourth place in urban air quality in the world	3.24	3.62	11.73%	3.78	3.93	3.97%
Digital society	3.78	4.32	14.29%	4.77	5.31	11.32%
Estonia is the first country to function as a digital service. Our citizens and e-residents can get things done fast and efficiently. A number of world-renowned technology companies were born in Estonia and the nation boasts more thriving start-up companies per capita than anywhere else in Europe.	4.75	5.08	6.95%	3.19	3.64	14.11%
Three minutes to file your taxes	3.24	3.51	8.33%	4.05	4.14	2.22%
Most entrepreneurial country in Europe	4.63	5.37	15.98%	4.64	4.63	-0.22%

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